# JESUS of Nazareth

## JEW FROM GALILEE, SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

JENS SCHRÖTER

*translated by* Wayne Coppins

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JENS SCHRÖTER
Translated by
Wayne Coppins and S. Brian Pounds

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To My Father

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# Translators' Preface

Jens Schröter, Professor of New Testament and Ancient Christian Apocrypha at Humboldt University of Berlin, is one of the most prominent scholars of early Christianity in Germany today. His key position in the field of biblical studies is evident, inter alia, from his role as coeditor of numerous leading journals and monograph series (e.g., *Early Christianity*, *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, and The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries monograph series), his authorial and editorial responsibilities in producing new editions of multiple landmark works in German scholarship (e.g., *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, with C. Markschies, and *Arbeitsbuch zum Neuen Testament*, with A. Lindemann), and above all from the great quality and quantity of his own publications in both German and English (see my website, *German for Neutestamentler*, for a bibliography of his English publications).

*Jesus von Nazaret. Jude aus Galiläa—Retter der Welt* or *Jesus of Nazareth—Jew from Galilee, Savior of the World* holds a special significance in Schröter's work for at least two reasons. First, it can be seen as a high point in an intensive phase of research that reaches from his habilitation thesis, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte* (1997), through the studies collected in *Jesus und die Anfänge der Christologie* (2001) and *Von*

*Jesus zum Neuen Testament* (2007; English translation 2013), and to the present. In fact, this book can be regarded as a mature synthesis of his view of the early Christian Jesus tradition and the quest for the historical Jesus. Second, while this work clearly reflects the highest level of academic scholarship, it has also been written to be accessible to a much broader audience.

Not surprisingly, the book itself showcases many of Schröter's wide-ranging areas of expertise: for example, in his sophisticated discussion of the nature of historical research, his nuanced assessment of the significance of Christian writings that did not become canonical, his characteristic emphasis on the central importance of Jesus' Galilean context, and his learned analysis of the Sermon on the Mount, the Son of Man texts, and the Last Supper. It also frequently reveals his remarkable ability to reframe long-standing debates: for example, when he objects to categorizing Jesus' statements on the reign of God into those related to the present and those related to the future on the grounds that such an approach fails to recognize "the central thrust of Jesus' conception of the dynamic, on-the-move reign of God" (p. 135), which is distinguished precisely by the extent to which it involves a connection between present and future.

Let us now turn to a feature of the work that should make it especially attractive for use in undergraduate and graduate education, namely the extent to which it exposes its readers to a broad range of early Christian views of Jesus. Rather than summarily setting aside traditions that cannot, in his view, be traced back to the earthly Jesus, Schröter frequently provides a close analysis of such traditions that includes an attempt to specify the ways in which a given tradition stands in continuity or discontinuity with the actions, message, and aims of Jesus as he (re)constructs them. The advantage of this approach is twofold. First, it provides the reader with a more representative picture of how Jesus is presented in the early Christian traditions than sometimes occurs in other Jesus books. Second, this approach makes it possible for readers to form their own judgment about the origin of a given tradition and the extent to which it stands in continuity or discontinuity with Jesus as they (re)construct him. A similar point can be made about the final chapter on the impact of Jesus, which both exposes readers to a valuable series of snapshots from the rich

*Wirkungsgeschichte* (effective history) of Jesus and provides resources for bringing this material into connection with the quest for the historical Jesus.

With regard to the translators' divided allegiance to the source and target languages, we have generally attempted to adhere closely to the German wording, while allowing for some adjustments for the sake of clarity and readability in English. In some places, however, our communication with Jens Schröter has also led to more extensive reformulations and occasionally to minor additions or subtractions in relation to the German version. As a rule, we have translated Schröter's translations of primary texts, citing existing English translations only in cases in which he has cited an existing German translation. The translators wish to thank Jens Schröter for his generous and invaluable assistance at each stage of the process. His comments on the manuscript both clarified many points of translation and saved us from more than a few errors.

We also wish to express our thanks to Annette Weidhas of Evangelische Verlagsanstalt and Carey Newman of Baylor University Press for making an English translation possible. Likewise we are thankful to the many people at Baylor University Press who have given us concrete guidance and assistance along the way, especially Jordan Rowan Fannin, Jenny Hunt, Diane Smith, Rachel Smith, Joseph Dahm, John Morris, and David Aycock. Finally, we thank our wives and children for their great patience when Daddy is translating.

Wayne Coppins and S. Brian Pounds
Athens, Georgia
July 2013

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# Preface to the English Edition

Jesus of Nazareth is a fascinating figure of history. His activity led to the establishment of a community that subsequently grew into what is today the largest world religion. From antiquity onward countless people have found orientation for their lives through his teaching. At the center of the Christian faith stands the confession that Jesus is "true human being and true God." This connection of divinity and humanity has always been a challenge for Christian faith and theology. For more than two hundred years, during the time marked by the Enlightenment and historical-critical research, people have asked what can be discovered about the human being Jesus of Nazareth by using critical reason and methods of historical inquiry. In this process the expression "historical Jesus" emerged. It highlights the distinction between the Galilean itinerant preacher from the first century and the portrayal of his activity and fate in the Christian sources. Whereas the Christian sources regard Jesus as the Son of God and exalted Lord, historical research describes him without presupposing such a confession. Thus, the quest for the "historical Jesus" is concerned with the foundation of the Christian faith as it can be described by means of historical research. It evaluates the historical sources that are at our disposal and on this basis sketches pictures of the activity and fate of Jesus. Christian faith thus poses the questions of critical reason and

historical research and participates on the basis of rationally grounded, plausible observations and arguments in the discourse about the interpretation of reality. Historical Jesus research therefore reveals the way in which the critical investigation of the biblical writings contributes to a historically grounded view of the beginnings of the Christian faith. Starting from impulses from the North American sphere, great attention has again been given to the question of the historical Jesus during the past thirty years or so. The Greco-Roman Mediterranean world and the Judaism of the Hellenistic-Roman period have thereby come into focus as the contexts within which the activity and fate of Jesus must be interpreted. In distinction from earlier phases, this line of research self-consciously refers to itself as the "third quest for the historical Jesus." Many recent portrayals of Jesus are obligated to this approach, regardless of all differences in detail.

Against this background this book first traces the discussion about the "historical Jesus" from its beginnings down to the present. Here, I also discuss key questions pertaining to a theory of history: What are the presuppositions for reconstructing the past? And what is the relationship between these reconstructions and past reality itself? After this, the activity and fate of Jesus are portrayed in their historical context. In chapter 14, a number of spotlights are then cast on the impact that Jesus has left in literature, film, music, and the fine arts.

It is a great joy to me that this book, which has thus far appeared in four editions in Germany, is now also available in English. Wayne Coppins and S. Brian Pounds have carried out the translation in an excellent manner. I am very thankful to them for their extremely knowledgeable and careful work. I also thank Carey Newman and Baylor University Press for their interest in the translation. May this book also find an audience in the English language sphere and contribute to the discussion about the "historical Jesus" and his significance for the Christian faith and human culture.

Jens Schröter
Berlin
July 2013

# Preface to the First Edition

Interest in Jesus is not restricted to the past; on the contrary, Jesus is relevant also and precisely in our time. The media are interested in him; seminars and lecture courses on Jesus in departments of religion or faculties of theology continue to attract many students; the question of the significance of his life and death occupies many people, both within Christian churches and beyond. What is the cause of this interest in the itinerant preacher from Galilee who was put to death by the Roman administration? The writings of the New Testament agree in all their diversity that his activity was a revelation of God besides which there is henceforth no other way to salvation. When it comes to Jesus the concern is thus with the whole, with the alternatives of a successful life or failure, meaning or meaninglessness—in the language of the Bible: it is a matter of salvation or judgment. This moved human beings at the time of Jesus; it also provokes engagement with him today. What way to a life of salvation and fulfillment did Jesus proclaim? What would such a way look like today in the light of the multiplicity of religions, the Christian confessions, and atheism? What do we hold on to when we hold on to Jesus?

The early Christians collected the witnesses concerning Jesus and wrote narratives about his activity and fate. In this way the New Testament emerged, which came alongside the authoritative writings of

Israel and placed them in a new light. The history of Israel, the sayings of its prophets, the talk of God's Anointed, the Christ, and of the Son of David—all this was now read in the light of the activity and fate of Jesus. Jesus thus became the central content of the Christian Bible. The volume on Jesus therefore obtains a special position in the series "Biblische Gestalten" (Biblical Figures).

The writings of the New Testament are intended to be read in the first instance as witnesses of faith in Jesus Christ. For the question of the *historical* Jesus this involves a particular challenge. It is a matter of distinguishing between what stands up to historical scrutiny and the legends that were already formed around the person of Jesus in the New Testament without tearing the two apart. For the early Christians the historical event and its interpretation through the faith witness belonged inseparably together. Historical research is therefore concerned with a Jesus picture that lets the connection between the historical events and their interpretation become comprehensible. This is also the concern of the present book.

A portrait of Jesus cannot make do without an overview of central questions and positions in scholarship. In a book of this format, this can only involve a sketch. It is clear to whoever looks at the recent works of Jesus research—for example the magnum opus of John P. Meier, which after three volumes and more than two thousand pages is not yet completed, or the no less impressive work of James D. G. Dunn, which extends to more than one thousand pages[1]—how much we must forgo here. Therefore, I would like to make explicit reference here to these and other Jesus books of recent years that have been constant companions in the composition of the current presentation and which I can often only implicitly involve in the discussion.[2]

I dedicate this book to the memory of my father. As someone who was well informed in philological questions and was an interested and engaged layperson in theology, he caught me time and again in discussions that reached beyond exegetical scholarship. In the process, it became clear to me that an engagement with Jesus reaches its goal only when it contributes to illuminating his significance for the present. It pains me that I can no longer discuss my attempt to portray the person of Jesus with him. This dedication is a small, inadequate substitute for this.

Marlies Schäfer, former secretary of the Institute for New Testament at the Theological Faculty of the University of Leipzig, and Friederike Kunath, former student coworker for my chair, read the manuscript carefully and put forward suggestions for making many formulations more precise. Friederike Kunath also obtained much material for the preparation of chapter 14, which deals with the impact of Jesus. Only a fraction of this material could be included in the presentation. I wish to thank both of them warmly for their engagement and thoughtfulness.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Annette Weidhas of Evangelische Verlagsanstalt for her friendly and well-informed care of the manuscript.

Jens Schröter
Leipzig/Berlin
March 2006

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# Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this book met with great interest and goodwill. In numerous lectures and professional conferences, pastoral gatherings, and church congregations, there also arose multiple opportunities to discuss the approach and theses of what was presented. I am just as thankful for this as I am for the many written reactions to the book that I have received.

That a second edition is now required is not least a sign of the increasingly perceptible interest in the person of Jesus and what can be said historically and theologically about his activity and fate. This discussion belongs to the most fascinating areas of theological research and reaches far beyond it into the areas of archaeology, philosophy, art history, and the history of piety. That it also increasingly meets with interest outside the field of theology is especially encouraging and welcome. It shows that the history of Jesus has lost nothing of its fascination also in the present but can still take up into itself questions about the meaning, goal, hope, and comfort of human life. Jesus research is therefore an area in which academic theology and Christian life formation can come into direct contact with each other and mutually stimulate one another.

The new edition of the book is unchanged for the most part. Only a few typographical errors were removed and a few titles from the

subsequently published literature were added. In view of its importance, a fundamental engagement would have been required with the Jesus book of Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, which was published in 2007. Since, however, this would go beyond the scope of the presentation set forth here and would have had to result in a special excursus or appendix, this has not been undertaken. Instead, reference may be made to the positions of Catholic and Protestant New Testament scholars in the volume edited by T. Söding: *Das Jesusbuch des Papstes. Die Antwort der Neutestamentler* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007).

Jens Schröter
Berlin
May 2009

# Part I

# INTRODUCTION

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# 1

# The "Historical" and the "Remembered" Jesus; or, How It "Really" Was

For our culture Jesus of Nazareth has a unique meaning. No other person has had a similar impact or influenced European history in a comparable manner. The Christian character of Greco-Roman late antiquity, the opposition of Pope and emperor in the Middle Ages, the Crusades, the Reformation, the Declaration of Human Rights, and the constitutions of numerous countries of the European and North American cultural sphere are historical effects of the religion at whose center stands the confession of faith in Jesus Christ. The traces of engagement with Jesus in music and literature, film and painting, philosophy and history writing—down to the reckoning of time *post Christum natum*[1]—testify to a unique fascination that has emanated from him for about two thousand years. At all times the Sermon on the Mount has served again and again, up to the most recent past, as a critical standard—and not only within Christian churches.[2] The beatitudes, the command to love one's enemies, and the Lord's Prayer are known also to people who are far away from Christianity as central contents of the proclamation of Jesus.

At all times Jesus' Passion has also found impressive representations—one need only think of the Passion music of Johann Sebastian Bach or the *Isenheim Altarpiece* of Matthias Grünewald (for this cf. the section "Good Friday and Easter: Suffering and Comfort upon

the Face of God" in ch. 14)—and it has even given inspiration to the *imitatio* of his pains. One can find motifs inspired by the Passion narrative up to the present and in everyday culture—as, for example, on the poster with which the German Red Cross promoted blood donations, which contained a clearly recognizable allusion to the New Testament words of the Lord's Supper (fig. 1.1). We will return to the impact of Jesus in chapter 14 of this book. Before doing so, a road must be laid that will lead us into the time when the itinerant preacher Jesus of Nazareth appeared in Galilee and Jerusalem. The effects that have gone forth from him cannot be understood without an engagement with these origins—even if they are not exhausted in them but represent creative further developments that testify to the formative power of the figure of Jesus.

Figure 1.1
*Advertisement of the German Red Cross for blood donations: "My blood for you."*

In the past few decades the discussion about who Jesus "really" was has broken out anew. Numerous Jesus books published since then have sketched different pictures of his person. Jesus has appeared as a social revolutionary who acted on behalf of the poor and oppressed, as a prophet who announced the imminent dawning of the reign of God, as a wisdom teacher who proclaimed a radical ethic, and as a charismatic who founded a new community that critically distanced

itself from traditional societal norms. In the following portrayal of Jesus it will become clear how these conceptions are to be evaluated according to the view presented here. At this point, however, it is first to be maintained that the new international Jesus research, which reaches across confessional boundaries, has impressively summoned into consciousness the significance of the quest for Jesus for Christian theology and beyond.

How could Jesus obtain such significance and become the center of a distinct religion? The witnesses of early Christianity provide a clear answer. The uniqueness of Jesus consists in the fact that in his person God and human being come directly into relation with each other. Through the activity of Jesus, the reign of God is established on earth; Jesus is the "image," "imprint," or "word" of God. He thus belongs on the side of God; he is the one through whom God has appeared in the world and toward whom God has acted in a unique manner in raising him from the dead. In Jesus Christ one thus encounters God himself. This simultaneously means that the confession of Jesus Christ leads to salvation and the coparticipation in his way mediates new life. Let me now mention three New Testament texts that bring this conviction to expression, each in its own way.

(1) John's Gospel speaks in an especially intensive way of the close relationship between Jesus and God. The actually invisible God is made known through Jesus (1.18); the one who sees Jesus the Son simultaneously sees God the Father (14.9). Jesus is therefore designated as the "Word," which was already with God before the creation of the world. In a similar manner, other New Testament writings call Jesus "image," "first born," or "reflection" of God and thus bring to expression his close relationship with God.[3]

(2) Luke 12.8-9 (par. Matt 10.32-33) says, "Whoever confesses me before human beings, the Son of Man will also confess before the angels of God. But the one who denies me before human beings will be denied before the angels of God." Here a judgment scene is presented: At the end of time one stands before God and his angels; Jesus, the Son of Man, can speak on behalf of someone or not. It depends on one's own confession to Jesus before human beings whether Jesus does this

and one is saved or whether one belongs to those who are condemned because one has denied Jesus in one's earthly life.

(3) In 2 Cor 5.14-15 Paul writes, "One died for all, therefore all died. And he died for all so that those who live may no longer live for themselves but for the one who died and rose for them." Here Paul connects the path of believers to that of Jesus Christ: they have died to their old life; they now have a share in the new life of the risen Jesus and have become a "new creation" through their belonging to him (v. 17). Thus, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are understood as an event in which human beings can participate and as an event that opens for them the possibility of a new life.

The union of God and human being in Jesus Christ that comes to expression in these texts—he is "Word of God," heavenly advocate in the last judgment, mediator of new life—was held fast to in the early Christian confessional formulae and was an undisputed foundation for Christian faith for a long time. It first became a problem for the modern consciousness. The Enlightenment specified human reason as a critical standard that was also to be applied to the biblical writings. This led to the distinction between rationally verifiable reports on the one hand and "myths" that interpret past events but must be distinguished from the events themselves on the other hand. The historical consciousness that emerged in the nineteenth century also made clear the distance that lies between the world of the New Testament and its interpreters. As a result, access to the past was tied to methodologically controlled research on sources that was supposed to lead to a picture of history that was as impartial as possible.

Enlightenment and historical-critical research compelled new reflection on the relation of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ. Now it appeared certain only that Jesus was a *human being*, whereas the unity of *God and human being* in his person could no longer be presupposed as unproblematic. As a consequence, interest became focused on what could be determined about his activity and fate by means of historical research, and with this the quest for the "historical Jesus" was born. This quest inquires about Jesus *without* presupposing the confession of his divinity. The uniqueness grounded in his divine nature was thus placed in question. Can the knowledge of the earthly

Jesus be reconciled with the confession of his divinity? Can the "historical Jesus" be reconciled with the "Christ of faith"? Historical Jesus research gives two answers to these questions.

The first answer says that one must distinguish between the results of historical research and faith convictions. Historical research can set forth a picture of the activity of Jesus and inquire into the causes for his execution on the basis of the witnesses that have been handed down. By contrast, whether Jesus acted with divine authority, whether God raised him from the dead, and whether he will return for the last judgment cannot be decided by means of historical criticism. Therefore, historical Jesus research does not make a judgment about the truth of the Christian faith either. Instead, it provides the foundation for comprehending its emergence. It makes clear that the Christian confession is a reaction to the claim of Jesus, which the New Testament designates as "discipleship" or as "faith," but also that there are other possible ways of relating to Jesus besides this one. The conflicts reported in the early sources already show that the authority of Jesus was traced back to the Spirit of God but also that it could be evaluated as an alliance with Satan.[4]

Historical research thus aims to understand the connection between events and their subsequent interpretation, between event and narrative.[5] It questions the sources with a view to whether what is reported by them *actually* took place, why precisely these things are reported about Jesus whereas others are not, and how event and interpretation relate to each other. Historical Jesus research thus views the sources with a critical and differentiating eye.

Biblical scholarship has decisively contributed to the development of this critical consciousness, whose beginnings can be traced back to the seventeenth century.[6] In Jesus research it occurred for the first time in the second half of the eighteenth century in a treatise titled "Apology or Defense of the Rational Worshippers of God" by the Hamburg Orientalist Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), posthumously published by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) in seven parts as "Fragments by an Anonymous Writer." Since that time, the distinction between the events of the life and activity of Jesus on the one hand and their portrayal in the Gospels on the other hand has been a presupposition of the engagement with Jesus, and nobody doubts its legitimacy.

The second answer runs as follows: historical research does not restore the past again as it once took place. Rather, it investigates the sources from the perspective of its own time and thus understands the past in the light of its own present. For historical Jesus research this means that historical research sets forth pictures of the person of Jesus that correspond to the state of knowledge about Jesus' time and that are at the same time influenced by the respective view of reality and by the assumptions that always play a role—consciously or unconsciously—in the interpretation of texts. Historical Jesus research thus exposes the Christian faith to critical scrutiny through historical-critical methods. In the process, it never attains certain, unrevisable results about the past. But it places an image of Jesus before one's eyes that is rationally and ethically accountable in relation to the sources in the respective present. Thus, historical Jesus research is not a venture that is opposed to Christian faith, though one can also deal with Jesus as a historical person without being a Christian. Historical Jesus research challenges Christian faith to formulate its confession of Jesus in the light of current knowledge about his person and his time.

Thus, historical Jesus research simultaneously presents a challenge and a gain for specifying the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. The challenge consists in exposing the confession of Jesus to critical examination through scholarly research and to think it through ever anew in the light of the findings that are brought to the surface in the process. The gain consists in the fact that in this way the confession corresponds to the current conditions of knowledge and understanding does not become inaccessibly distant and conveyed only with difficulty. Let me also explicate this in somewhat greater detail.

The numerous Jewish writings that have been discovered and published since the second half of the nineteenth century have led to a much more exact perception of Judaism at the time of Jesus.[7] Today's portrayals of Jesus distinguish themselves at precisely this point from those that were written before these writings became known. But the fact that the Jewish sources are viewed with different eyes today has also contributed to this difference of perception. The new reflection on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism that began in the Christian theology of the second half of the twentieth century—initiated not least by the Shoah—is responsible for this change. It has

substantially increased our sensitivity to the rootedness of Christianity in Judaism. No one disputes today that Jesus and Paul must be understood in the context of ancient Judaism—the one as a Galilean itinerant preacher, the other as a Diaspora Jew and Pharisee converted to Jesus Christ. The investigation of ancient Judaism as the historical context for the activity of Jesus and for the emergence of the Christian faith has been able to show that theses such as those of an "Aryan Jesus" or of pagan religion as soil that nourished early Christianity are false or one-sided. Not only the source situation but also the perspective on the sources have changed. Historical research always also has a corrective function with respect to the understanding of the present in light of the witnesses of the past.

Thus, historical research is equally obligated to the past and to the present. It preserves the traces of what has been from being forgotten; at the same time it resists a manipulation of the past for ethically questionable or politically questionable purposes.[8]

It is therefore necessary to distinguish between a "historical Jesus" set forth with the methods of historical research and the "earthly Jesus": the "historical Jesus" is always a product of the evaluation of the sources by a male or female interpreter. Depending on how the sources are judged and fit together different pictures emerge. Historical portrayals of Jesus—precisely also portrayals put forth in more recent research based on intensive evaluation of the sources—therefore reveal differences that are substantial in part. Historical research will never attain to a definitive picture of Jesus, for the sources do not allow for only one interpretation. By contrast, the "earthly Jesus" is the Jew who lived and was active in Galilee in the first century and is no longer directly accessible in later times but is accessible only as mediated through interpretations. Therefore, historical portrayals of Jesus, just like other historical portrayals, are always a linking of present and past, and they contribute in this way to the understanding of reality. Therefore, the result of a present-day historical portrayal of Jesus is the Jesus *remembered* and *made present* from a specific perspective at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[9]

How was it "really"? This question can be answered only when facts and events are interpreted within a framework that is first disclosed to the view of the later interpreter. The historical events around Jesus, with which we are concerned in what follows, must be joined

with one another and placed in a historical context. Whether a contemporary of Jesus would recognize him in the picture that emerges remains a hypothetical question that does not determine the value of a present-day portrayal of Jesus. What is more important is that such a Jesus picture must be plausible under current conditions of knowledge and oriented to the sources—also and precisely at those points at which Jesus appears foreign and uncomfortable to us in these sources. "Really" then means plausible in light of current presuppositions of understanding; understanding one's own present in the light of the witnesses of the past, thus as a present that has *come into being historically*. Therefore, the question of who Jesus *was* cannot be separated from the question of who he *is* today.

# 2

# A Glance at the History of Research

A present-day portrayal of Jesus builds on the work of more than two hundred years of historical-critical research. It profits from the insights concerning the sources and the political, religious, and cultural context of Jesus that have been gained along the way.

Historical-critical Jesus research is usually divided into three phases: the so-called "Liberal Life-of-Jesus Research," which characterized the nineteenth century and came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century; the so-called "New Quest for the Historical Jesus," whose beginning is usually seen in the 1953 lecture of Ernst Käsemann on "The Problem of the Historical Jesus";[1] and the direction that began in the 1980s and designated itself as the "Third Quest" for the historical Jesus. Naturally, one can also make divisions that deviate from this schema.[2] The concern in what follows, however, will not be with such questions of division but with a number of fundamental characteristics of modern Jesus research.[3] An important presupposition for the question of the *historical* Jesus is the aforementioned evaluation of the biblical writings by the standard of critical reason. That the Bible, the foundation of the view of the world and humanity in Christian antiquity and in the Christian Middle Ages, became an object of scholarly criticism in modernity is a development whose significance can scarcely be overestimated. It forms the foundation for

the historical-critical consciousness, which no longer automatically identifies the statements of Holy Scripture with the truth, but distinguishes between historical reality and interpretation. This distinction, which appears self-evident today, was a genuine revolution at the time of its emergence.

Within Jesus research this development is first discernible in the work of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, who has already been mentioned. In his aforementioned writing on the defense of the "*rational* worshippers of God" he identified a difference between the teaching of Jesus and the emergence of the Christian faith, and he designated it as a "common error of the Christians" to have mixed the two together. The proclamation of Jesus himself is said to have been an ethical teaching situated in the context of Judaism that was oriented to "a change of mind, to non-hypocritical love of God and neighbor, to humility, gentleness, and self-denial, and to suppression of every desire," thus to the moral improvement of humanity, but not to a new religious system that would replace Judaism. Rather, the apostles (here Reimarus means the authors of the New Testament letters as distinct from the evangelists, whom he regarded as writers of history) first developed this system after Jesus' death and replaced the simple, natural religion of Jesus with the system of a Savior who suffered, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come again in judgment.

Despite a number of deficiencies, which cannot be dealt with in greater detail here, the theory of Reimarus is the first thoroughgoing explanation of the teaching of Jesus in relation to its historical context. That the question of Jesus is always *also* a task of historical research was rightly emphasized by Reimarus (and Lessing) and has been clearly stressed again in recent Jesus research. Insights into the political, social, and religious conditions at the time of Jesus are, of course, much more precise than in the time of Reimarus. These insights form an important component of present-day portrayals of Jesus. In order to describe the activity of Jesus one must ask about the people with whom he came into contact; one must consider the social and political conditions of the region in which he was active. In order to illuminate the historical context of Jesus one must draw on all the materials that provide information about it. Biblical and extrabiblical texts provide insights into the history of Palestine and Galilean Judaism. Archaeological discoveries, inscriptions, and coins help to make this picture

concrete. Comprehensive consideration of this material has become a firm component of Jesus research in the past two decades.[4] In the program to understand Jesus from his Jewish context, Jesus research moves in the paths of Reimarus.

A further aspect emerges from the special character of the Gospels. If Reimarus—and similarly also Lessing—viewed their authors as reliable writers of history,[5] then David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) discovered that the reports about Jesus were formed by motifs that originated for the most part in the Old Testament or in Judaism (as for example the expectation of the coming Messiah) and were then transferred to Jesus in order to bring to expression the significance of his person. Strauss used the concept of "myth" for this, by which he understood the "history-like cloaking" of ideas, which were viewed as realized in the person of Jesus and whose highest idea was the notion of the God-human-hood (*Gottmenschheit*). If Reimarus thematized for the first time the relation between the activity of Jesus and the emergence of the Christian faith, then Strauss questioned the Gospels themselves in relation to their historical foundation. The differentiation between historical reality and interpretative presentation that was thereby introduced can subsequently no longer be removed from Jesus research.

The question raised by Strauss of whether the historical events around Jesus belong to the truth of Christianity or whether they can ultimately be abandoned in favor of the "ideas" with which they were interpreted was answered by Martin Kähler (1835–1912) in a 1892 lecture with the revealing title "The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historical, Biblical Christ," to the effect that to attempt to go behind the biblically testified Christ to the historical Jesus is to bark up the wrong tree. The New Testament portrayal is said to be a proclamation whose truth cannot be drawn out with the methods of historical criticism. Instead, it is a matter of recognizing the *real* Christ in the *preached* Christ. By contrast, Kähler rejected a distinction between the historical events and their interpretation through the Christian faith that allegedly first gives meaning to them.

The line from Strauss to Kähler can be extended via Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich up to the American exegete Luke Timothy Johnson.[6] The characteristic feature of this position is to regard a portrayal of Jesus beyond the Christian faith witnesses—and with this the project of a "historical Jesus"—as unrealizable in light of the sources

and as theologically improper. The interpretations of the activity and fate of Jesus are said to be precisely the form in which Jesus has become influential; therefore it is said to be methodologically and materially inappropriate to search for a "historical Jesus" independently of these interpretations.

This position has had a lasting influence in German-language Jesus research. Its fundamental validity resides in the insistence that historical research does not penetrate behind the Christian faith convictions to the "real" Jesus. That the post-Easter faith convictions have decisively shaped the portrayals of the pre-Easter activity of Jesus is beyond question. At the same time, it would be premature to dismiss for this reason the quest for the historical Jesus in principle. One can indeed distinguish between historical events and their interpretation in the Gospels; contours of the person of Jesus can be recognized in the narrative conceptions of the Gospels. Therefore, a fundamental skepticism toward a picture of Jesus constructed with the help of historical criticism[7] goes too far.[8] Such a picture includes much more than what Bultmann thought could be said about the activity of Jesus.[9]

At this point a tendency is recognizable that decisively shaped Jesus research in the wake of Bultmann. The portrayals of Jesus in this phase, the so-called "New Quest for the Historical Jesus," were usually concentrated on his "proclamation." Thus, the "essential meaning" of his activity was seen primarily in his words and parables, whereas the historical and social context was treated more in passing as a "framework."[10] This presupposes the thoroughly accurate insight that traditions existed prior to the Gospels and that these have been placed in a chronological and geographical framework by the Gospels themselves. This "framework," however, is by no means unimportant. Rather, it mediates important insights concerning the time and regions of the activity of Jesus and embeds his activity in concrete social, cultural, and religious contexts. It is therefore indispensible for an interpretation of his activity. By contrast, it would not be illuminating to reduce the significance of Jesus to his "proclamation," to remove this proclamation from its historical connections, and to marginalize the concrete contexts that first allowed his activity to be comprehended historically.

Thus, the line of Jesus research bound up with the names of Strauss, Kähler, Bultmann, and Johnson formulates an important corrective

against a naïve identification of historical research and past reality: the significance of the activity and fate of Jesus cannot be grasped independently of the interpretations in the early sources. Instead, historical presentations must make comprehensible how interpretation and historical event are to be related to each other. On the other hand, the insight into the "mythical" or "kerymatic" character of the Gospels does not speak against their value as historical sources. Rather, the historical context of the activity of Jesus remains thoroughly recognizable and permits one to trace the contours of his activity.

A third aspect of historical Jesus research is bound up with the name of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). Schweitzer clearly recognized the dependence of historical presentations on their authors' judgments and standards of value within Jesus research. In his *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (History of the Life-of-Jesus Research = *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*) he criticized the portrayals of Jesus in the research of the nineteenth century for not taking the foreignness of Jesus seriously and for bringing Jesus, at the cost of the preservation of his distinctiveness, into their own time, from which, however, he returned again to his own time.

While Schweitzer rightly drew attention to the danger that lies in an unreflective appropriation of the past, his own conception also possessed a methodological weakness: Schweitzer wanted to replace historical knowledge, which was said to be subject to provisionality, with the foundation of the Christian faith, which was regarded as independent of changing historical judgments.[11] He thought that he found this foundation in the "personality" and the "will" of Jesus, which was said to be independent of the conceptual material in which it was clothed.[12] With this viewpoint Schweitzer stands in the tradition of a picture of history that is characterized by the orientation to great personalities and that had also already become discernible in the Jesus research before him.[13] At the same time, with his emphasis on the supposedly timeless "will of Jesus," Schweitzer prepared a direction that was then built on by the above-discussed direction that is focused on the "proclamation" of Jesus.

Thus, Schweitzer is concerned, like Kähler and Bultmann, with a secure foundation upon which access to Jesus can be founded. This foundation is sought by all three scholars beyond changing historical judgments. This notion, however, is an illusion. In our engagement

with Jesus it cannot be a matter of wanting to separate what is "timelessly valid" from the changing "material" in which it is clothed. This can be shown without difficulty with reference to Schweitzer himself: his concentration on the supposedly timeless "personality" of Jesus and his "will" are indebted to the personality ideal of the nineteenth century and to a certain view of "late-Jewish" apocalyptic thought—and thus thoroughly time-conditioned, even if in a different manner than the portrayals criticized by him. Christian faith cannot be founded on an "unshakable foundation" or an "eternal truth of reason" as understood by Lessing. Rather, it is always affected by historical developments and changes in the view of the past bound up with them; it is subject to constant testing in relation to the sources and exposed to critical questions about the plausibility of its interpretation of reality. It is precisely on this relativity that the strength of a faith that does not refuse such critical testing is founded. Only a faith that is intellectually and ethically accountable is immune to the danger of withdrawing into a special sphere and becoming mere ideology. Only such a faith can therefore survive in the public discourse about the interpretation of reality.

Finally, reflection must be given to a further issue: the fact that the Gospels blend pre- and post-Easter traditions with one another confers an ambivalence to the venture of critical Jesus research from the very beginning: the question of which traditions are judged to be authentic and which are judged to be later interpretations, and which facets are judged to be especially prominent and characteristic and which are judged to be rather unimportant, also always depends on the presupposed overall picture of reality that informs the activity of Jesus.

The variety of the Jesus pictures in recent scholarship provides an impressive piece of evidence for this. The differences emerge not—at least not in the first instance—from the fact that scholars are working with different historical materials, but from the assumptions about the historical plausibilities that are presupposed in each case. Thus, for example, Ed Parish Sanders regards Jewish "restoration eschatology" as the context within which the activity of Jesus must be interpreted. In the process, he evaluates the narrative of the temple expulsion as the most certain point of departure for an investigation of the activity of Jesus and begins his portrayal with an analysis of this event.[14]

By contrast, for Richard A. Horsley the social conditions in Palestine in the first century are the decisive context for interpreting the activity of Jesus. In contrast to Sanders, the activity of Jesus is therefore analyzed much more strongly in relation to its political and social implications. Jesus wanted to make it possible to experience the reign of God already in the present, as the new order that is directed against oppression and social injustice, and not, as Sanders thinks, to point to the future order established by God himself.[15]

If arguments for various placements of Jesus in his historical environment can be advanced, then this does not mean that the presentations thereby become arbitrary. It shows, however, that historical-critical Jesus research moves within a certain "fuzzy sphere," since it deals as a historical endeavor with sources that do not mediate an unambiguous picture of the past. Therefore, its goal cannot be to reach the *one* Jesus *behind* the texts but to reach a conception grounded on the weighing of plausibilities, which as an abstraction from the sources always moves *in front* of the sources.

If we summarize this overview, then we see the following: Jesus research since the second half of the eighteenth century has created important methodological and thematic presuppositions for an engagement with Jesus under the conditions of the modern historical-critical consciousness. It moves in the tension between historical reconstruction, which wants to know how it "really" was, and post-Easter construction, which regards this aim as unreachable and orients itself instead to the post-Easter faith witnesses. In both options we are dealing with radical solutions that are inadequate if taken on their own. Together, however, they give modern Jesus research a dynamic that shows itself to be extremely fruitful: the engagement with the sources presents a picture of the past that as a product of the present always remains, however, changeable, fallible, and incomplete. Therefore, historical research can never ground the Christian faith let alone prove its correctness. It can, however, show that this faith is founded on the activity and fate of a person, who can still be portrayed today, if not in every detail, then at least in important facets. In this way it makes a substantial contribution to the task of taking intellectual and ethical responsibility for the Christian faith in the modern world.

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# 3

# The Historical Material

## *Remains and Sources*

### Remains

Johann Gustav Droysen, the founder of the modern methodology of historical work, divided the material that is available to the historian into "remains" and "sources." On the one hand, there are witnesses of the past that were intended to be used in the time of the past but not to record events in order to hand them down to posterity. To this category Droysen assigned, for example, commercial letters, correspondences, laws, and so on. On the other hand, in sources "past matters are handed down in the way that human understanding apprehended and expressed them, formed as recollection." Thus, the concern here is with the sort of witnesses in which human beings have drawn a picture of their own time, in which they have interpreted and retained their reality.[1]

If we apply this distinction to historical Jesus research, then "remains" include those things that provide information about the cultural, political, social, and religious context of Jesus. For example, we can assign to this category the archaeological witnesses from Galilee that the excavations of the past decade have brought to light. The Jewish character of Galilee has been impressively highlighted by these witnesses.[2] This category also includes coins that give information

about the fact that Herod Antipas, the ruler in Galilee at the time of Jesus, respected the Jewish character of this region by not having coins minted with his own image or that of the Roman emperor. Finally, this category also includes discoveries such as that of the boat in the Sea of Galilee or the inscription with the name of Pilate, which attests his office designation "prefect."

*The Pilate inscription from Caesarea Maritima*. This inscription is displayed in the Israel museum in Jerusalem (fig. 3.1). There is a copy in ancient Caesarea, where the inscription was found. The text reads,

[ ] TIBERIEUM
[ PON] TIUS PILATUS
[PRAEF] ECTUS IUDA[EA]E

[This] Tiberieum
[Pon] tius Pilatus
[Pref] ect of Judaea
[established]

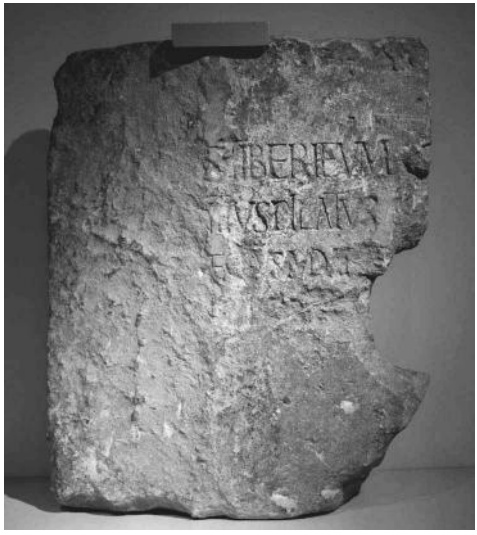

Figure 3.1
*The Pilate inscription from Caesarea Maritima: Pilate as "praefectus Iudaeae." Photograph by B. R. Burton. Public Domain.*

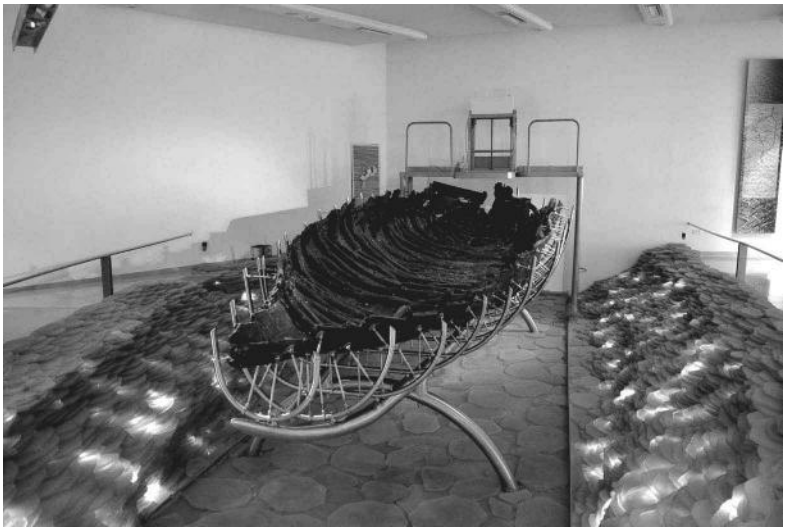

Figure 3.2
*A boat from the Sea of Galilee from the first century CE.*
*Photograph by Berthold Werner.*
*Public Domain.*

*The boat discovered in the Sea of Galilee in 1986.*[3] This boat comes from the first century and is therefore occasionally referred to as the "Jesus boat" (although no one knows, of course, who actually used it) (fig. 3.2). After a complicated and spectacular conservation and salvage operation it can now be viewed in the Yigal Allon Museum in Kibbutz Ginosar on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Capernaum. The discovered remains are approximately 26.9 feet (8.2 meters) long and 7.7 feet (2.35 meters) wide; the entire boat was accordingly approximately 32.8 feet (10 meters) by 9.8 feet (3 meters). Thus, it was impressive in size, which makes it appear suitable for transporting multiple people or greater masses of goods. The use of many types of wood in the construction and subsequent repairs is conspicuous, which allows one to conclude that building wood was scarce. A ship mosaic from nearby Magdala shows a similar type of boat. The boat could illustrate a scene such as the one described in Mark 4.35-41: in this passage Jesus sleeps "in the stern," which allows one to infer that it was a larger boat with a developed stern.

## Christian Sources

### The writings of the New Testament

Sources that provide information about the historical Jesus consist of those witnesses that have preserved historically usable information and are not, in turn, dependent on older sources. By contrast, later texts often embellish the life of Jesus legendarily and do not have historical value for the time of Jesus. They already belong to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* and can therefore be passed over in this section.[4]

The Jesus tradition was passed down orally in its beginnings. This process, which in all likelihood already began during the activity of Jesus, fundamentally shaped the character of this tradition. As an originally oral tradition, it also retained its variability in the respectively concrete linguistic and thematic shaping during and after the time of its first commitment to writing. This immediately becomes clear when one places different versions of a saying, parable, or episode from the life of Jesus alongside one another. The flexibility of the tradition also continued when written versions already existed. This can be seen without difficulty from the writings of the second century and from the textual tradition itself.[5] If one adds to these observations the fact that in all likelihood Jesus spoke not Greek—the language of the New Testament authors—but Aramaic, then it becomes clear that the oldest accessible Jesus tradition also has already undergone a linguistic and thematic development: it has passed through a process of oral tradition and thematic interpretation, been translated into another language, and been handed down in texts, from which we possess different manuscripts from about the end of the second century that often deviate from one another. This makes clear once more that we construct a picture of Jesus from these sources that is dependent on our judgment about these sources, but that must be distinguished from the person to whom these sources refer.

The oldest texts in which we learn something about Jesus are the letters of Paul. Paul is only marginally concerned to report biographical information about the activity of Jesus. Nevertheless, we find traces of old tradition in his letters. These include in the first place the notice about "the night in which Jesus was handed over," with which the report of the institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11.23-25

begins. These include also the mention of the Davidic descent of Jesus (Rom 1.3), to which I will need to return.[6] In both cases Paul cites traditions that reach back into an early period.

In a few places Paul then explicitly mentions a word of the Lord in the context of instructions that he gives. Alongside the words of institution of the Lord's Supper these include the prohibition against the separation of husband and wife (1 Cor 7.10-11) and the instruction that those who proclaim the gospel should also live from it (1 Cor 9.14). In 1 Thess 4.15, Paul also speaks of a "word of the Lord." At other points his formulations show points of contact with the synoptic tradition, without him explicitly appealing to the Lord in these cases.

- The saying about the thief in the night in 1 Thess 5.2 (cf. also 2 Pet 3.10 and Rev 3.3; 16.16) occurs in an analogous way in Luke 12.39/Matt 24.43 as well as in *Gos. Thom.* 21.5-7. Here the metaphor of the thief is used in a word picture of Jesus. In all of the instances the context is the exhortation to watchfulness in light of the fact that the point in time when Jesus will come in judgment is unknown.
- The exhortation to keep peace in 1 Thess 5.13 (cf. Rom 12.18) is introduced in Mark 9.50 (cf. Matt 5.9) as a command of Jesus.
- Analogies to the exhortation not to return evil with evil in 1 Thess 5.15/Rom 12.17 and to the closely related admonition to bless and not to curse the persecutor in Rom 12.14 are found in the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6.28/Matt 5.44) as well as in 1 Pet 3.9. We are dealing here with a topos of primitive Christian paraenesis that was received in both the Synoptic Gospels and in the epistolary literature. The saying about doing good toward the enemy in Rom 12.20, which is a citation from Prov 25.21 in Paul, occurs in the synoptic tradition as Jesus' command to love one's enemies (Luke 6.27, 35/Matt 5.44).
- The Jesus saying in Mark 7.15/Matt 15.11, "Nothing that enters into human beings from the outside can make him unclean," can be compared with the topos in Rom 14.14 that nothing is unclean of itself.

- The saying about the faith that moves mountains in 1 Cor 13.2 has analogies in Mark 11.22-23/Matt 17.20 (cf. also Luke 17.6 as well as *Gos. Thom.* 48 and 106).

These findings show that before the emergence of the Gospels a sphere of tradition already existed in which the teaching of Jesus was handed down together with other traditions as the instruction of primitive Christianity. The distinction between "authentic" sayings of Jesus and other traditions did not play a role here. Rather, it was decisive that the primitive instruction as a whole was regarded as authorized by the Lord. For Paul too the primitive tradition was authorized as such by the exalted Lord, without him having to mention this in every instance. Thus, the earthly Jesus is significant here only as the one who is simultaneously the Lord who is risen and exalted to God.

The most important writings in the New Testament for the quest for the historical Jesus are the Gospels. These emerged a few decades after the activity of Jesus and now retained the recollection of his activity and fate in the form of narratives. They rework for this purpose both the teaching of primitive Christianity and biographical traditions about his origin, the places and people of his sphere of activity, and the circumstances of his death. Within this process of tradition there is therefore a continuity of the recollection of Jesus through which the central aspects of his activity were retained. Here certain forms can be recognized in which the Jesus tradition already existed and was handed down prior to the emergence of the written narratives. In chriae (or apopthegms), concise scenes with a pronouncement or a deed as their point,[7] sayings and actions of Jesus are handed down—in healing narratives his extraordinary deeds are handed down, in aphorisms and parables his teaching.

The Gospels do not, however, narrate the activity and fate of Jesus in an order that can form the basis of a historical presentation. Rather, they usually order the traditions under formal aspects—for instance through grouping parables, controversy dialogues, or miracles—and give a thematic significance to the geographical outline through the opposition of Galilee and Jerusalem. The individual events, for instance the parables and miracles of Jesus, his calling of disciples, and the controversies with opponents, thus obtain their significance within the pictures of Jesus set forth by the evangelists.

This can be illustrated with an example: in Luke the parable of the great feast is told by Jesus on the occasion of an invitation to eat in the house of a Pharisee and is closely linked to this situation: Jesus exhorts the host not to invite to a meal people from whom one hopes to receive a return invitation, but to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. This is then illustrated with a parable (Luke 14.12-24). Matthew also narrates a version of this parable (Matt 21.1-14). In Matthew, however, it is part of a longer speech, comprising three parables (Matt 21.27–22.14), that Jesus gives on the occasion of his dispute with the high priests and elders in the Jerusalem temple and that develops a common theme: "The first addressees have refused and will be replaced by another group." Thus, the parable is integrated in respectively particular ways into the interpretations of Jesus' activity by Luke and Matthew. In one case it serves the instruction on proper behavior toward the needy; in the other case it is a warning to the leaders and also to the Christian community to answer the call to conversion in their concrete behavior. We can no longer reconstruct the occasion on which Jesus himself told such a parable, what its exact words were, or to whom it was originally addressed. Therefore, the significance of the parable for a historical portrayal of Jesus can be drawn out only through an analysis of the literary reworking in the Gospels.

Furthermore, Jesus' activity and fate were interpreted in the light of the Easter experience, which gave a new meaning to him. This meaning went beyond his earthly activity and placed it in a new light. Therefore, in the evaluation of the Gospels for the historical Jesus question, one must also consider that they intend to testify to faith in Jesus as God's Son and present his earthly activity in this light. This is clearest in the Gospel of John, where there are multiple references to the new insight into the meaning of Jesus that was mediated by the Easter experience and by the Spirit bound up with this.[8]

Let me also give an example of this phenomenon: In the narrative of the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6 we encounter the phrase "And he took the five loaves of bread and the two fish, looked up to heaven, gave thanks and broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples . . ." (v. 41). When a very similar formulation is later used at the Last Supper in Jerusalem (Mark 14.22), then it is clear: the meals that Jesus celebrated with the people already point forward to the Last

Supper, in which he interprets his work once more in a summarizing manner. Finally, the beginnings of the Gospels make clear that the entire activity of Jesus is placed under the sign of his status as Son of God: the depiction of his miraculous birth in Matthew and Luke, the prologue about the divine Logos in John, the adoption as Son of God in the baptism in Mark.[9]

Thus, in the Gospels the meaning of Jesus is unpacked in such a way that in the narration of his earthly activity and fate, pre-Easter events and post-Easter faith are fused. This must be taken into account in their evaluation for the historical Jesus question. But this does not at all change the fact that we encounter important information for a historical profile of the person of Jesus in the Gospels. The Gospels even contain the decisive information about the geographical, religious, and cultural context of the activity of Jesus, the people in his environment, central contents of his activity, and the circumstances of his death. They are therefore the foundation for a historical picture of Jesus.

Beyond what has been said above, the critical research of the end of the eighteenth century and of the nineteenth century has led to two important results that involve the relationship of the Gospels to one another: it was able to show that there are clear differences between the first three Gospels, namely Matthew, Mark, and Luke, on the one hand and the Gospel of John on the other hand, and that the first three "Synoptic" Gospels are connected to one another literarily. In response to the question of how exactly the latter relationship is to be imagined (the so-called "Synoptic Problem"), the most widely accepted solution that crystallized was that the Gospel of Mark is the oldest and that it served as a *Vorlage* (prototype) for Matthew and Luke. The exact form of the text of Mark that they used can now be determined only by way of approximation.[10] In any case, there is much to be said for the thesis that Matthew and Luke used different versions of the Gospel of Mark and that these versions must be distinguished once again from the subsequent versions attested by the preserved manuscripts.[11]

In terms of time, we are moving in the case of the Gospels between about 70 CE and the end of the first century. In the Gospel of Mark, the events of the Jewish-Roman war of 66–70 CE are probably reflected; Matthew and Luke should be dated somewhat later;

John is an even later work. This dating makes clear that while the Gospels have reworked older traditions, they were first composed themselves a number of decades after the death of Jesus. They look back at the activity and fate of Jesus from a changed political situation, and they presuppose a development in which the Jesus movement has opened itself to the Gentile mission and has distinguished itself more clearly over against Judaism.

From these findings it also emerges that Matthew and Luke had access to further traditions that were partly available to them in written form. This is shown by the fact that they have a number of traditions in common beyond Mark that show clear agreements in wording. From these data scholars in the nineteenth century already inferred the existence of a second source alongside Mark that was used by Matthew and Luke but was no longer handed down independently thereafter. This postulated source, for which the abbreviation "Q" has been established since the end of the nineteenth century, is, however, never explicitly mentioned.[12] Therefore, its existence, which could have been only brief in duration anyway, remains a hypothesis.

In recent years there has been intense discussion around this postulated source. Attempts have been made to grasp its thematic profile more precisely and even to reconstruct its wording.[13] Since, however, no manuscript has been handed down, the speculations about its scope, content, and literary profile—ultimately even its existence—remain largely hypothetical. Theses such as the theory that we are dealing with a source whose picture of Jesus deviates clearly from that of the Synoptic Gospels and instead comes into contact with that of the *Gospel of Thomas* move in the realm of speculation.

Even if no reliable statements can thus be made about the scope, literary profile, and also in many cases the wording of Q, the traditions assigned to Q nevertheless belong to the most important witnesses of the oldest Jesus tradition. The concern is with texts that Matthew and Luke apparently had independent access to, which also include parallels to traditions found in Mark, and which enrich the picture of the oldest Jesus tradition in this way.

Especially in those texts that are handed down in both Mark and Q,[14] it is fairly probable that we are dealing with very early traditions. These include, for example, the announcement of Jesus by John the Baptist, the Beelzebul controversy, the mission discourse, the parable

of the mustard seed, and the exhortation to take up one's cross. In principle, texts that are handed down only in Matthew, Luke, or an extracanonical text such as the *Gospel of Thomas* could also be very old, of course. But the material from Mark and Q, which—according to the solution to the Synoptic Problem that has been sketched out here and that is usually presupposed today—was already present in any case at the beginnings of the commitment to writing of the Jesus tradition, provides a point of orientation insofar as a picture of the historical Jesus can scarcely be set forth against this material.

In the Gospel of John we find a Jesus picture that deviates clearly from the Synoptic Gospels. Here the way of Jesus begins directly with God, whence Jesus then comes into the world in order to reveal God. On the basis of this divine origin, which is present throughout the Gospel of John, the world can also only apparently have a hold on Jesus.[15] Even in the Passion narrative Jesus remains sovereign. Thus, the Gospel of John is especially interested in stressing the divinity of Jesus—presumably because this was in dispute. Despite this strong emphasis on the theological interpretation of Jesus' nature, John also preserved traditions that are of interest for a historical investigation. These especially include his own reworking of the sayings of Jesus as well as details about places and events in the Passion narrative.[16] The fact that John is the only one who reports the baptizing activity of Jesus and multiple stays in Jerusalem also deserves attention.

## Christian writings outside the New Testament

Jesus traditions that should be taken into account for a historical portrayal of Jesus are also found outside the New Testament. In the first instance, these include some of the texts assigned to the so-called "Apostolic Fathers." We are dealing here with writings that emerged between the end of the first century and the second century and were not received into the New Testament when the canon was definitively determined.[17] Although these texts mostly emerged later than the New Testament Gospels, it is possible that they have preserved traditions that are independent of the Gospels. In various cases this is also thoroughly probable, even though the historical profile of Jesus is not fundamentally changed by these traditions.

Thus, we find sayings in *1* and *2 Clement* that are traced back to Jesus and have partial parallels in the Gospels of the New Testament. In *1 Clement* 13.2 a series of "sayings of the Lord" are cited that demonstrate the "gentleness and forbearance" that Jesus taught. The sayings come into contact with the Sermon on the Mount without necessarily showing a direct literary dependency. Similarly, reference is made in *1 Clement* 46.7 to "sayings of our Lord Jesus" that are quoted in what follows. Here, the saying about the millstone is in view, which also occurs in Mark 9.42/Matt 18.6 and is cited in *1 Clement* 46.8 in a distinct version. In *2 Clement* there are many references to the fact that "the Lord" or "Jesus" said something. Whether the author had a written document with Jesus traditions at his disposal can no longer be clearly determined. The *Didache*, a church order from the beginning of the second century, cites a number of traditions —including, for example, a version of the Lord's Prayer—that also have parallels in the Synoptic Gospels. Here, however, they are traced back to Jesus only in part. In accordance with its title, the *Didache* stands, by contrast, under the authority of the twelve apostles. On the whole these findings point to the fact that Jesus tradition also existed as a free and living tradition after its first commitment to writing.

One would also have to mention the texts that are assigned to the so-called "Apocrypha," literally the "hidden writings."[18] This designation could be employed by the authors of these writings themselves. With the *Apocryphon of John* a writing is even handed down that is already designated as "apocryphal" in the title; at the beginning of the *Gospel of Thomas* the content of the writing is characterized as "hidden [apocryphal] sayings of the living Jesus," and the *Gospel of Judas*, which has recently become known, refers to itself as a "hidden report of the revelation that Jesus spoke to Judas Iscariot." According to the self-understanding of these writings, "apocryphal" is a positive description of their content: special teachings of Jesus or special knowledge are mediated that are not accessible to the "average Christian" but reserved for chosen circles. By contrast, the theologians of the ancient church used "apocryphal" in a disparaging way and equated it with "inauthentic" or "counterfeit." Today the term functions in a neutral sense as a collective designation for texts that belong neither to the New Testament nor to the Apostolic Fathers. As a result there is simultaneously a certain degree of fuzziness: today, for example,

texts that are not attested in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospels but were first inserted into them at a later point are also assigned to the apocryphal traditions.[19] But these also include subsequently emerging writings of a very different character, which are often preserved only in fragmentary form and in many cases do not have any thematic or literary relationship to one another. In today's understanding "apocryphal" is therefore an umbrella term for various kinds of texts that have in common the fact that they neither belong to the oldest text of the New Testament nor are assigned to the Apostolic Fathers.[20]

A number of the apocryphal texts have been known for at least 150 years.[21] Here, we are dealing in part with fragments that contain individual sayings or episodes and in part with larger sections of gospels or with writings of a different character that contain Jesus traditions. Interesting examples of fragments are Papyrus Egerton 2 and Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840; important apocryphal gospels from the second or third century are the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Judas*. By contrast, other texts have always been known, because people enjoyed reading them in the church, although they were not "officially" accepted. Here, we are dealing with popular narratives that legendarily embellish the life of Jesus and the apostles, thus representing a kind of Christian folk literature. These include, for example, the so-called "infancy gospels," to which we will return in "The Apocryphal Jesus: At the Margins of 'Official' Christianity" in chapter 14 but also the apocryphal acts of the apostles that romantically embellish the lives of the apostles.

For some time there has been intense discussion about the relationship of some of the apocryphal texts to the New Testament. An important role has been played by the question of whether the apocrypha contain additional information about Jesus that would supplement or even change the picture obtained from the New Testament. This is sometimes bound up with an interest in presenting the Christianity of the first two centuries as a movement that was not yet characterized by ecclesiastical orthodoxy and hierarchy, and also for which the subsequently established canon of the New Testament was not yet decisive.[22]

It is fundamentally accurate here to observe that the question of whether a text is assigned to the New Testament, to the Apostolic Fathers, or to the Apocrypha plays no role in the quest for the

historical Jesus. Rather, these represent later divisions and evaluations that provide no information about the historical source value of the individual writings. Accordingly, old tradition could also be found in the so-called "apocryphal" gospels.

As a rule, the thesis of the early dating and independent character of the extracanonical writings does not, however, hold up under closer examination. This will be shown in somewhat greater detail in relation to the following examples.

In the two identifiable fragments, Papyrus Egerton 2 (PEg 2)[23] hands down various episodes that represent variants of narratives in the New Testament gospels (fig. 3.3). After its independence from the New Testament gospels was initially hypothesized (the first publication took place in 1935), the supplementing of the papyrus through a fragment from the Köln papyrus collection (PKöln 255), published in 1987, has shown that PEg 2 combines material from the Synoptic Gospels with material from the Gospel of John.[24] Thus, it belongs to a later phrase of the Jesus tradition than the New Testament gospels, even if it is not necessarily literarily dependent upon them.

Figure 3.3
*Papyrus Egerton 2, fragment 2, front. From Bell and Skeat 1935.*

The *Gospel of Peter*[25]—from which a part, discovered in 1886/1887, is preserved in Greek, and to which two additional fragments could subsequently be assigned[26]—contains a version of the Passion and Easter narrative. A number of features indicate that we are dealing here with a version that belongs to a later tradition-historical stage than the corresponding reports of the Synoptics and the Gospel of John. These include especially the one-sided attribution of the guilt for the death of Jesus to the Jews as well as the embellishment of the resurrection scene through the stone that comes to roll by itself, the motif of the cross that follows Jesus and speaks, and the voice from heaven.

The *Gospel of Mary*[27]—from which a longer section exists on a codex belonging to the Berlin papyrus collection, the so-called "Berolinensis Gnosticus" (BG 8502), as well as two Greek fragments from the third century[28]—hands down in the preserved pages (1–6 and 11–14 of the original eighteen pages are missing) a dialogue of the "Savior" with his disciples prior to his departure as well as a subsequent dialogue of Mary with the disciples. Here, Mary speaks of special revelations that were given to her in a vision, which evidently included a heavenly journey. At the end there is a dispute over the authority of Mary, which is called into question by Peter and Andrew but defended by Levi. In the process, the *Gospel of Mary* presupposes the narratives of the appearance of the Risen One in the Gospel of Matthew, presumably also in the Gospel of John, and on this basis sets forth a post-Easter conversation situation.[29]

Among the apocryphal gospels, the *Gospel of Thomas* has received special attention.[30] The discovery of this writing in Codex II of the thirteen codices found in 1945 in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt was truly sensational. For the first time one possessed an (almost) complete text of an apocryphal gospel—at least in a Coptic translation—the existence of which was already known previously through citations by church fathers.[31] In the first decades after its discovery, scholarship intensively occupied itself with the question of the relationship of the *Gospel of Thomas* to the canonical gospels, and especially to the Synoptics. This already seems reasonable because of the fact that about half of the sayings and parables that occur in the *Gospel of Thomas* have parallels in the Synoptic Gospels. In the meantime this debate, which was to some extent heated, has given way to a more

level-headed analysis of the *Gospel of Thomas*. In the process, it has become clear that the *Gospel of Thomas* is a witness for a line of reception of the Jesus tradition that begins in the second century. The oldest fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* in Greek also come from this time.

The *Gospel of Thomas* is interested not in a portrayal of the activity and fate of Jesus in his historical context, but in his sayings and parables, which are characterized as "hidden words of the living Jesus"—"hidden" because special insight is required in order to recognize their actual, deeper meaning. These include both very old traditions, such as the blessing of the persecuted (saying 68), the parables of the mustard seed and leaven (saying 20 and 96), and the saying about the homelessness of the Son of Man (saying 86), as well as later traditions, such as the saying about the origin of the kingdom into which one will return again (saying 49) and the saying about the entrance of the "individual" into the bridal chamber (saying 75). Thus, the early Jesus traditions were interpreted in the *Gospel of Thomas* within a new conceptual framework. This conception is oriented toward Jesus as the revealer of true humanity, whose words point out the way back to the origin and with this to the determination of the human being. The programmatic saying about seeking and finding that stands at the beginning (saying 2), the designation of the world as a "corpse" (saying 56; cf. 80), and the related exhortation to keep oneself from the world and to seek instead the way back to the Father (saying 27) also belong in this context. With this conception of redemption through knowledge the *Gospel of Thomas* shows a proximity to writings that speak of the need of the human being to become again what he or she originally was.

For the quest for the historical Jesus this means that it is entirely possible that old traditions are found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The overall concept, however, is later than that of the New Testament gospels. Therefore, the canonical gospels provide the framework within which the sayings from the *Gospel of Thomas* have to be interpreted with regard to the historical Jesus. This is to be distinguished from an interpretation of the *Gospel of Thomas* itself as a witness to the reception of the Jesus tradition in the second century.

Thus, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers as well as the apocryphal gospels are witnesses to the variety of interpretations that the person of Jesus was subject to in the second and third centuries. For a historical

reconstruction, however, they are of only secondary importance, even when old traditions are to be found in them. It is decisive that the perspective on Jesus has changed: if Jesus was described in the writings from the first century as active in Galilee and Jerusalem in the context of Judaism, then this was later replaced by religious-philosophical systems and secret revelations that then shaped the understanding of his teaching. A dating of these writings to the first century would therefore signify a distortion of the historical findings, according to which the activity of Jesus is to be interpreted within Judaism.

It follows from these findings that the four gospels that became canonical have priority for a historical portrayal of Jesus, both on account of their age and because they set forth a profile of the activity of Jesus in its historical context. This profile belongs to the "historizing" tendency of these writings and forms the starting point for a present-day historical portrayal.[32] It is also possible that old traditions have been preserved in gospels that did not become canonical. For a historical Jesus picture, however, these have to be interpreted within the geographical, cultural, and religious milieu that is portrayed by the New Testament gospels.

In all the sources mentioned one must distinguish between old, historically reliable traditions and traditions that emerged later and have secondary importance for the historical portrayal. The concern here is naturally not with judgments that can be proven in the strict sense, but with judgments that rest on the plausibility of the overall picture and may remain contested in individual cases. In general, however, the criterion of the historical plausibility and coherence of the portrayal applies, which stands in a dialectical relationship to one's decision in individual cases. In the historical evaluation of sources we are therefore dealing with an ever-moving circle of overall picture and individual tradition, which are to be related to each other and to mutually correct each other in the process—a procedure that is generally applied in historical work. In the portrayal of Jesus developed here, the activity of Jesus is therefore sketched within the context that must be presupposed for it, to which then—taking my orientation from the described evaluation of the sources—the respective traditions are assigned. In this way, in what follows I will develop a plausible and coherent picture of the activity and fate of the historical person of Jesus.

## Non-Christian Sources

The few extra-Christian notes about Jesus can be subdivided into Jewish and pagan sources. In what follows we will discuss the most important of these witnesses.

(1) The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (ca. 37 CE to sometime after 100 CE) comes to speak of Jesus in a passage of his work *Jewish Antiquities*. As recognized today, we are dealing here with a section of text that has been reworked from a Christian perspective.[33] This is not surprising insofar as the works of Josephus were handed down not by Jews but by Christians. The additions that were most likely made have been placed in italics in what follows. The text reads,

> Around this time Jesus lived, a wise human being, *if one may even call him a human being*. For he was a doer of completely incredible deeds and the teacher of all people who received the truth with joy. Thus he attracted many Jews and also many Gentiles. *He was the Christ*. And although Pilate condemned him at the instigation of the most distinguished of our people, his earlier adherents were not unfaithful to him. *For he appeared to them alive again on the third day, as God-sent prophets had proclaimed this and a thousand other wonderful things about him beforehand*. And the people of the Christians, who name themselves after him, remains up to this day. (*Ant*. 18.63–64)

It is noteworthy in the first place that a Jewish historian at the end of the first century (the *Jewish Antiquities* appeared in the 90s) came to speak of Jesus at all. It is also interesting that Josephus describes Jesus as a miracle worker and teacher. That is probably entirely representative of the perception of Jesus by his Jewish contemporaries. There was probably also a remark about the designation of Jesus as "Christ" in the original text of Josephus. This is supported by the fact that the end of the text mentions the "people of the Christians" who are named after him. But this note presumably did not have the character of a confession ("he was the Christ"), as the text now reads. It could, however, have read "he was called Christ." An analogous formulation in Josephus' note on James, whom he designates as "the brother of Jesus, who is called Christ" (*Ant*. 20.200), points in this direction.[34] Finally, it is noteworthy that Josephus also speaks of adherents of Jesus *among*

*the Gentiles*. It is not completely clear where Josephus has obtained this information, or whether it is based on the Palestinian context of the activity of Jesus or on Josephus' own perception of Christianity in Rome where Josephus lived at the time of the composition of his work. At any rate it corresponds both with some data in the Gospels, where there is also mention of Gentiles who turn to Jesus,[35] and with the historical situation of Christian communities outside of Palestine at the time of Josephus himself.

(2) Both pagan texts point to Rome. In a report about the fire of Rome during the reign of the Emperor Nero, the Roman historian Tacitus (ca. 56–ca. 120) comes to speak of the rumor that the Christians were responsible for this fire (*Ann*. 15.44.2-3). He writes,

> But neither through human assistance nor through imperial gifts nor through offerings presented to the gods could the shameful rumor that the fire had taken place by order be removed. In order to put an end to this rumor Nero attributed the guilt, and demonstrated it with the most exquisite punishments, to those who were hated because of their shameful deeds (*flagitia*) and whom the people called Christians (*Christiani*). Christus, the originator of this name, had been put to death during the rule of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate. The baneful superstition (*superstitio*) that was initially suppressed thereby broke out, however, anew, not only in Judaea, where this evil had its origin, but also in the capital (*urbs*), where all terrible and shameful horrors and detestable things from all around flow together and are practiced.

Tacitus composed the *Annals* in the late phase of his life (ca. between 115 and 118), thus at a time in which the reported events already lay a number of decades back.[36] His note is thus a witness to the perception of Christians by the Roman upper class at the beginning of the second century. Tacitus knows that the Christian faith originated in Judaea, that it was initiated by a "Christus" (Tacitus naturally thinks here of a person's name and not of a Jewish designation of majesty), and that this figure was executed during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (14–37) by Pontius Pilate. He calls the latter "procurator," although Pilate, as shown by the previously mentioned inscription, held the office designation "prefect."[37] Tacitus was evidently not precisely informed here. In addition Tacitus provides the oldest non-Christian evidence for the name "Christians" (*Christiani*). This indicates that the

Christians were already perceived as a distinct group in the 60s of the first century in Rome. Tacitus also disseminates the common pagan prejudices against the Christians when he speaks of them being hated among the people because of their "shameful deeds."

This is confirmed by the second extra-Christian source. Seutonius (ca. 70–ca. 120), a biographer of the twelve emperors from Caesar to Domitian, mentions in his description of the life of the Emperor Nero that Nero proceeded against the Christians with death sentences, and Tacitus designates the Christian faith as *superstitio*.[38] In his biography of the Emperor Claudius (41–54), he comes to speak in addition of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome initiated by Claudius: "The Jews, constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled from Rome."

This action, which is also mentioned in Acts 18.2 (in Corinth Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla, who had to leave Rome because of the order of Claudius) and then once more by the fifth-century Christian historian Orosius, should probably be dated to 49 CE. Disputes about the message of Christ within the Jewish community of Rome stand in the background. Suetonius traces these disturbances back to "Chrestus," which he, like Tacitus, understands as a personal name. The reason that this was never corrected to "Christus" in the subsequent (Christian) textual tradition presumably lies in the fact that Jesus, as the scribes knew, was never himself in Rome. Thus, the historical value of the note of Suetonius resides in the fact that it shows how a pagan author perceived the Christianity that had come to Rome: he had heard of a "Chrestus" who incites the Jews to unrest. By contrast, Suetonius does not have more exact information about the person and content of the Christian proclamation—nor does he appear concerned to make more exact inquiries about it.

The non-Christian sources thus show that Josephus is the only one who perceived Jesus as a person whose activity seemed worthy of a more exact characterization of its content. He reports on Jesus' extraordinary deeds and his teaching as well as his success among Jews and Gentiles. He presumably also mentions that Jesus was designated as Anointed ("Christus") by his followers. Like Tacitus, Josephus also knows about Jesus' group of followers, whose name is derived from "Christus." They also both know the designation "Christians," which is also attested in the New Testament (Acts 11.26 in the plural; Acts

26.28 and 1 Pet 4.16 in the singular). In contrast to Tacitus and Suetonius, Josephus, as a Jew, naturally knows that "Christus" is a designation for one sent by God with a special task and not a personal name. Therefore he distinguishes between the name "Jesus" and the designation "Christus."

By contrast, Suetonius and Tacitus evidently have knowledge of the activity of a "Christus" or "Chrestus" only in connection with events in Rome. It therefore emerges from their reports that Christianity already played a role in Rome in the first century. It is understood as an inner-Jewish group by Suetonius, whereas Tacitus explicitly mentions its origin in Palestine. In addition, Tacitus knows to assign the execution of Jesus to the reign of Tiberius when Pilate was in office. Finally, for Tacitus the "Christians" are adherents of one of the many forms of superstition in the Roman Empire, and he registers their pervasiveness with contempt. The pagan authors, however, do not possess more exact knowledge about Jesus and the movement that goes back to him—and furthermore they would presumably have refused to occupy themselves more closely with such an obscure movement from the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

## About This Book

A number of conclusions with regard to the portrayal of Jesus that follows arise from the remarks in the first part of this book. Part II traces out the way and activity of Jesus. Here, it must be taken into account that the sources at our disposal do not allow us to construct a continuous biography of Jesus. For example, no pieces of information about the time prior to Jesus' public activity are available, and the birth stories are legendary narratives, as will be shown in greater detail. Therefore, a portrayal that is accountable to the sources will hold back—in contrast to what sometimes happens in the media—from speculations about his childhood and youth, which have no basis in the reliable traditions.[39] But it is also the case for the time thereafter that we only have sources at our disposal that describe Jesus' public activity. By contrast, the early traditions are only marginally interested in his physical appearance, his eating or sleep habits, or in more exact

details about his origin. Where such statements occur—for example in the saying about the Son of Man who has no place to lay his head, in the characterization of Jesus as a "glutton and drunkard," and in sayings about his parents and siblings—we are always dealing with programmatic formulations that describe his actions and proclamation. Such aspects were of significance only from this perspective and never independently of it.

There are, however, sufficient notices available that make possible the tracing of the activity and fate of Jesus within a concrete historical context. This context is the Galilean Judaism of the first century. Therefore, the first part of the following portrayal begins with a sketch of this environment in relation to which the historical person of Jesus must be understood.

The second part turns to the characteristic features of the activity of Jesus. Here, Jesus' connection to John the Baptist, the community founded by Jesus, the proclamation of the dawning rule of God, and the ethos bound up with it, come into view first. On the basis of these aspects it becomes clear that the activity of Jesus was directed to the renewal of Israel, but that he understood this renewal in such a way that outsiders—sinners, lepers, sometimes even Gentiles—could have a share in it. Although Israel stood at the center of his activity and Jesus did not advance an active "Gentile mission," the boundaries of the people of God were permeable for him.

Thereafter we turn to the self-designation of Jesus as "Son of Man." It will become clear that the self-understanding of Jesus that comes to expression in this designation, namely that he is the representative sent by God to his people, both decisively shaped the manner of his activity and led to conflicts that emerged around his person.

Every portrayal of Jesus stands before the task of making his death comprehensible as the consequence of his activity. This means not only a consideration of the circumstances that led to his execution, but also asking the question of how Jesus himself could have understood his death. That Jesus' death radically called into question his claim and the meaning of his coming is clear. It is, however, equally clear that this death was very quickly understood by his followers as the end of only his earthly existence and not as the end of the action of God toward him and through him. This comes to expression in

the statements about his resurrection and exaltation, which allow his earthly activity to appear in a new light. Therefore, these convictions belong in a portrayal of the way of Jesus.

From this starting point a *Wirkungsgeschichte* has developed that has had a lasting impact on the entire religious, cultural, and intellectual history of the West. Some spotlights from this are taken into view in chapter 14 of this book.

# Part II

# A PORTRAYAL OF JESUS

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# 4

# A Jew from Galilee

## *The Nazarene*

In this and the following two chapters we approach the historical context of Jesus in three steps. We begin with his immediate surroundings—his hometown and his family—and gradually extend the perspective outward: first to Galilee, where important parts of the public activity of Jesus took place, and finally to the Judaism of the time of Jesus as the cultural and religious context of his activity.

Jesus comes from Nazareth in Galilee. In Mark 6.1 this village is designated as his hometown;[1] he himself is variously designated as "Nazarene" or "Nazorean," even in Matthew and Luke, who narrate his birth in Bethlehem.[2] Even the Gospel of John, which—like Mark—does not contain a birth story, presupposes his origin from Nazareth: in John 1.45-46 Philip says to Nathanael that he has found the one announced by the Law and Prophets, Jesus from Nazareth, the son of Joseph—which is immediately followed by the skeptical question of whether anything good can come from Nazareth. Later, his origin from Galilee is put forward even as an argument against his messiahship by the Jews: the Messiah is supposed to come from the line of David and from the village of Bethlehem, whereas Jesus comes from Galilee and is not a Davidide; consequently he cannot be the Messiah.[3] It is unmistakable: the origin of Jesus from an unknown Galilean village can only with difficulty be reconciled with the confession that he is the Messiah of Israel.

Matthew and Luke therefore bring the birth of Jesus into connection with the prophetic promise that the future ruler of Israel will come from Bethlehem.[4] This promise is found in the book of the prophet Micah (Mic 5.1) and is regarded as fulfilled in Jesus. Therefore, Matthew can also explicitly cite this word in his birth narrative (Matt 2.6). The underlying logic of the birth narratives thus runs: because Jesus is the promised Messiah whom God sent to his people, his birth can also be presented—despite the contrary "historical" evidence—as taking place in Bethlehem. In this way, the conviction of the special significance of Jesus is emphasized, which would not be brought to expression through the description of an "ordinary" birth.

In the process, the birth stories in the two gospels show a clear difference in the coordination of Nazareth and Bethlehem. This is, as a rule, no longer recognizable in the combination of the two narratives in Christmas readings and music. In the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 1.17–2.12) the events take place from the beginning in Bethlehem, which is mentioned for the first time in 2.1. After the birth of Jesus, the family must then flee from Herod to Egypt. Only later, after the death of Herod, do they return, on account of a command that Joseph receives in a dream, to the land of Israel and then move, on account of a command in another dream, to Galilee (Matt 2.19-23). They settle in Nazareth, which is first mentioned in Matt 2.23. All of this—the birth in Bethlehem, the stay in Egypt, the move to Nazareth—stands in Matthew under the sign of the fulfillment of prophetic promises.

In Luke, by contrast, the announcement of the birth of Jesus by the angel Gabriel to Mary takes place in Nazareth (Luke 1.26-27).[5] Thus, Joseph and Mary live in Nazareth and must travel from there, on account of the imperial census allegedly ordered by Augustus, to Bethlehem (Luke 2.1-5).[6] Later they return again to Nazareth, which is explicitly called "their city" (2.39). The Lukan birth story also stands under the sign of the fulfillment of the promises to Israel: Jesus is called "son of the most high," to whom God gives the throne of David, and who will rule over the house of Jacob (Luke 1.32-33); the coming of Jesus is referred to as redemption and glory for Israel and as light for the Gentiles (2.32). These findings show that the birth in Bethlehem is an old motif that aided the portrayal of the faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of David in early Christianity. Matthew and

Luke have integrated this motif into their birth stories in respectively distinctive ways.

Beyond this we encounter additional motifs that are also found in other accounts of miraculous births, for example in the cases of Moses, Plato, or Alexander the Great. In Matthew echoes of the Moses story in Jewish tradition emerge; in Luke we also find connections to a text that was very well known at that time, namely to the Fourth Eclogue of the Roman poet Virgil (70–19 BCE), in which the birth of a divine man-child is announced, whom a virgin (the allusion is to Dike, the goddess of righteousness) will bring into the world. This is presumably intended for the birth of the Roman emperor Augustus. Thus, ancient readers were familiar with the fact that miraculous events are found in accounts of the births of extraordinary human beings.

Such motifs, which occur not only in Matthew and Luke but also in other texts, include divine conception and birth from a virgin,[7] the activity of wise people (the "magi from the east," Matt 2.1), an astronomical sign (the "star of Bethlehem," Matt 2.2),[8] as well as the murder of children and the deliverance of the newborn child (Matt 2.16-19). The genealogies in Matt 1.1-17 and Luke 3.23-28 and the activity of shepherds in Luke 2.8-20 also surround the birth of Jesus with a special aura.[9]

Thus, in the circumstances of Jesus' birth the special character of his nature and his subsequent way are already recognizable: generated by God's Spirit, born from a virgin, Jesus is the God-sent savior of Israel and the Gentiles. Through Jesus' designation as Son of David and Son of Abraham (Matt 1.1), Matthew indicates that the salvation that begins with the coming of Jesus will lead beyond Israel to the Gentiles. Luke presents Jesus as the one through whom God will help to vindicate Israel, but whose birth must simultaneously be described in a world-historical dimension: he is the new universal ruler of peace, who is equally a light for Gentiles and for Israel (Luke 2.32). Thus, the birth stories of Matthew and Luke, which form the foundation of the Christian message of Christmas, interpret Jesus' way as the salvation of God sent to Israel, which will, however, lead beyond Israel and also encompass the other nations.

In John, by contrast, the promise of the Davidic Anointed One from Bethlehem and the actual origin of Jesus strike forcefully against each other. In the process it becomes clear that the one who objects

to Jesus' messiahship with reference to his origin from Galilee fails to recognize his true nature. Jesus thus fulfills the messianic hopes of Israel—and with this also the Scriptures—in a manner that is accessible to only a deeper understanding. The Gospel of John therefore begins with a prologue in which Jesus is depicted as the divine Logos, who becomes flesh and reveals the glory of God in the world. God sends his Son into the world in order to save it. Here too the special character of the nature of Jesus is already bound up with his entrance into the earthly sphere. John even goes beyond Matthew and Luke when he ascribes preexistence to Jesus: as the divine Logos he was already with God before the creation of the world, and therefore he has a share in God's glory, which he also retains in his activity in the world.

Only the Gospel of Mark, the oldest Jesus narrative, contains no prehistory but begins directly with the appearance of John the Baptist. Here Jesus is therefore first "adopted" as Son of God at the baptism, which already occurs in Matthew and Luke at his conception and is rendered unnecessary in John on account of the divine nature of the Logos, who then becomes flesh. There is, however, a passage in Mark in which the problem is also reflected upon: in Mark 12.35-37 Jesus enters into debate with the objection of the scribes that the Anointed One must come from the line of David. Jesus refutes this claim with the help of a proof from Scripture: in the Psalm (Ps 110.1 is meant) David himself refers to the Christ as his Lord; consequently he cannot be the Son of David. In this argument it is presupposed that David is the composer of this psalm and that the psalm is concerned with the Anointed One. Both presuppositions are plausible without further ado according to early Jewish and Christian views. If, however, the Christ is not a son of David, then Jesus can be the Christ. As in John, the problem that Jesus from Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary, should simultaneously be the Messiah of Israel is resolved in a different way than in the birth legends of Matthew and Luke: his origin from the line of David is not constructed through a legend; rather, it is explained that his non-Davidic lineage does not speak against the God-authorized activity of Jesus.

The findings make clear that the Gospels already presuppose the confession that Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah and configure their narratives about his activity and fate in the light of this conviction. Therefore, the birth stories are not historical reports,[10] but

legends that can be explained against the background of the conviction that already comes to expression in Rom 1.3 (which was already mentioned above), where Jesus is referred to as "born from the seed of David according to the flesh."[11] The statement that immediately follows then sets over against this the new quality that he has obtained through the resurrection and the concomitant enthronement as Son of God. Thus, the tradition of the Davidic origin of Jesus goes back to an early confession that was reworked by Matthew and Luke into legends about his miraculous birth. While the enthronement as Son of God was still bound up with the resurrection in Paul, this is moved back in the Gospels to his baptism (Mark) or birth (Matthew and Luke), or even heightened to a statement about his preexistence as the divine Logos (John), so that it specifies his earthly way from the very beginning.[12]

Thus, we remain directed to Nazareth for the origin of Jesus. Jesus thus comes from a small, unimportant village in Lower Galilee, which had fewer than four hundred inhabitants in his day.[13] It was there that his family lived;[14] it was there that he—apparently like his father—was active as a craftsman (Mark 6.3; Matt 13.55).[15] This place also plays only a subordinate role in the Jesus tradition. According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus made only a single public appearance there—and this was entirely unsuccessful.[16] It is therefore hardly surprising that Christian literature first begins to be interested in this place in the third century and that its existence could even be doubted in the nineteenth century because of its weak literary attestation. Thus, Nazareth does not play a noteworthy role for the activity of Jesus. This results above all from the fact that when Jesus began his public activity, he separated himself from his hometown and his family. That this took place in a thoroughly programmatic way is recognizable in the fact that Jesus declared such a separation to be an indispensible element of his activity and also expected it from his followers.[17]

From the Gospels we discover nothing that is historically usable about his childhood and youth.[18] In order to draw out how Jesus was influenced by his environment, we must therefore consider the Galilean context.

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# 5

# A Jew from Galilee

## *The Galilean*

The Galilean origin of Jesus has been drawn upon in different ways to interpret his person and his activity. Jesus from Galilee—from this starting point there arose in the nineteenth century the romantic notion of a rural ideal in which God revealed himself in his Son, and which stood in opposition both to the Old Testament and to the subsequent history of Christianity. At the beginning of the twentieth century Jesus was detached from his Jewish context with reference to his Galilean origin. Galilee was said to be a multiethnic, predominantly non-Jewish area, for which reason it was said that Jesus was presumably not a Jew. This thesis was first advocated in the context of National Socialist racial ideology. But it has also occurred again more recently—now with a view to giving Jesus' sayings the flair of a cosmopolitan popular philosophical teaching. The beginnings of Christianity are thereby detached from Judaism and traced back to a group of Jesus followers in which both Jews and Gentiles were found.[1] Jesus the Galilean—this has finally played a role when the concern has been to situate his activity in relation to social and political conditions. Here, Galilee sometimes appears as a place of social unrest and as a refuge for the resistance against Roman rule. The activity of Jesus is understood against the background of a tense political situation

within which he sided with the poor and oppressed and opposed the socially and politically powerful.

In all these pictures there is a danger that one's own circumstances are being projected back into the time of Jesus and what one deems politically or socially desirable is also passed off as the intention of Jesus. Recent investigations on ancient Galilee, however, show that none of these pictures stands up under closer examination. Rather, in the past decades, the investigation of the region that Jesus came from and that formed the most important location for his activity has led to completely different conclusions. The excavations that have been carried out since the 1970s under the direction of American and Israeli scholars are of special importance here. The Gospels provide only sparse indications about the environment of Jesus. Geographical and climatic conditions as well as political and social circumstances come into view only at the margins. For example, in contrast to what we find in the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, there is no description of the landscape of Galilee or the political and economic circumstances at the time of Jesus.[2] This sort of information can often be derived only from indirect remarks, such as when the occupations of those called to discipleship are mentioned or when Herod Antipas is presented as the adversary of Jesus and John the Baptist.

At the same time, the places and people mentioned mediate a picture of the geographical and historical context of Jesus: there is mention of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida (Luke 10.13/Matt 11.21) and also of Dalmanutha in Mark 8.10 (apparently located on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee);[3] Mary, who belongs to the closest environment of Jesus, comes from Magdala. All of these places are located in the immediate proximity of the Sea of Galilee and form the center of the activity of Jesus. Mention is also made of Cana, where Jesus turns water into wine according to John 2, as well as Nain, where a young man is raised from the dead according to Luke 7.11-17. Both places are located in Lower Galilee, to the north and to the south of Nazareth.

The depicted scenes often take place in the open air: Jesus goes along the sea, wanders through fields with his disciples, and crosses over the sea. Sometimes he also enters synagogues and private houses. What should we have in mind here?

## Excursus
## Synagogues and Domestic Houses in Galilee

The word "synagogues" does not necessarily refer to buildings. In the first instance, the word refers (like the Hebrew *Knesset*) to a gathering, and it was then transferred from there to the building in which this gathering takes place. Texts such as Acts 13.43 ("when the synagogue dispersed . . .") and Jas 2.2 ("When a man with a gold ring and fine clothes enters into your synagogue . . .") show that in the New Testament "synagogue" can also mean "gathering" and can even be used for Christian gatherings. In the recent period there has therefore been discussion about whether the Gospels generally use the word "synagogues" to refer to gatherings. Luke could then already be projecting back later circumstances into the time of Jesus when he presupposes a synagogue building in Nazareth (4.16-30) and speaks of the building of a synagogue in Capernaum (7.5). The archaeological findings could also support this view, since no synagogue building from the first century has been found thus far in Galilee.[4] If one follows this view, then up to the first century, one would find buildings for Jewish gatherings only outside of Galilee, thus in the Diaspora, where they are usually called places of prayer (*proseuche*), whereas corresponding buildings cannot be demonstrated with certainty in Judaea and Galilee.

However, remains of buildings used for gathering from the time before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE have been excavated in Gamla, a place that lies about 6.2 miles (10 kilometers) northeast of the Sea of Galilee, which belonged to the territory of Herod's son Philip at the time of Jesus, and in Judea (at the fortress of Masada, in the Herodion, and possibly also in Jericho). The Theodotus inscription that was discovered to the south of the old city of Jerusalem is also important. In this inscription from the 30s or 40s CE, a certain Theodotus makes known that he had the synagogue to which the inscription was attached built for the reading of the law, for instruction in the commandments, and as a shelter for strangers. The existence of a synagogue in the immediate surroundings of the temple is explained by the fact that in Jerusalem there lived Jews from the Diaspora who held gatherings in their own native languages. Thus, it is entirely plausible historically when Acts 6.9 mentions various groups of Diaspora Jews who had their own synagogues in Jerusalem.

In contrast to what is the case for Judea, the existence of synagogue buildings cannot be shown with certainty for Galilee at the time of Jesus, but neither can their existence be excluded. Attention must be given here to the fact that synagogues served various purposes of public life; thus, they were not only places for religious gatherings. It is therefore possible that with the comment that Jesus preached in "their synagogues" in all Galilee (Mark 1.39; Matt 4.23; Luke 4.15), the authors of the Gospels were thinking of corresponding buildings and that this was also historically accurate, at least for a number of the locations. This is admittedly not certain: they could also have meant gatherings or have incorrectly presupposed the existence of synagogue buildings.

As for domestic houses, various types have been shown archaeologically for Galilee. Villas and larger farmhouses reflect the life world that is also presupposed in parables such as the parable of the rich farmer (Luke 12), the parable of the owner of a vineyard (Mark 12 and *Gos. Thom.* 65), the parable of the master of the house who finds day workers (Matt 20), and the parable of a man who arranges a great banquet (Luke 14 [Q]; *Gos. Thom.* 64). For the immediate environment of the activity of Jesus, the houses presupposed for the simple people are relevant. The families in the villages of Galilee lived either in individual houses with two or more rooms or in complexes made up of multiple houses that were built around one or multiple inner courtyards. The so-called "House of Peter" belongs to this latter type (fig. 5.1).[5]

Remains of domestic houses whose oldest components reach back into the first century were discovered in Capernaum under a church from the fifth century. One of these was already renovated for gatherings in the second half of the first century. Since we are dealing with a building that was used by Christians (as is shown by drawings and inscriptions from the third to fifth century), it is sometimes hypothesized that we could be dealing here with the house (of the wife) of Peter mentioned in the Gospels, which already served as a gathering room for Christians in the first century and was later rebuilt into a church.

Irrespective of whether this hypothesis is accurate, the archaeological findings from Capernaum mediate a picture of domestic houses in a characteristic place for the Galilean activity of Jesus. It shows

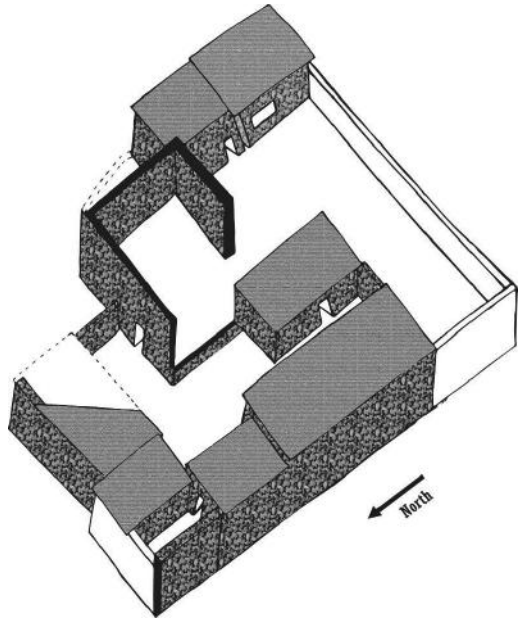


Figure 5.1
*The so-called "House of Peter" in Capernaum.*
*Re-creation by Rachel Smith.*

that the followers of Jesus belonged neither to the well-to-do nor to the poor but came from the ordinary village population. The findings also shed light on a scene such as the one found in Mark 2.1-12: it is reported there that people brought a lame man to Jesus but could not reach him because of the crowd in front of the door and therefore dug up the roof in order to lower him down from above before Jesus. The place in front of the door that is mentioned could refer to an inner courtyard where the crowd gathered because Jesus was present. The digging up of the roof fits well with the findings, since the roofs of the houses were made of mud and reeds.

Capernaum lies on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee and had between 600 and 1,500 inhabitants at the time of Jesus.[6] Its location at the border between Galilee and the northeast-bordering Gaulanitis, the territory of Philip (present-day Golan), explains why a toll station existed there according to Mark 2.14 and why Jesus meets a centurion in Capernaum according to Luke 7.2. According to the

Gospel of Mark, Jesus' public activity begins there (1.21); somewhat later (1.29-31) he goes with Simon and Andrew into their house and heals Peter's mother-in-law there.[7] It is also occasionally mentioned later that Jesus stays in the house or in a house in Capernaum.[8] This may refer to the house of Simon or his wife, where Jesus could have lived when he stayed in Capernaum. Matthew even reports a proper "move" by Jesus: according to Matt 4.13 Jesus leaves Nazareth in order to henceforth live in Capernaum, which is even called "his city" in Matt 9.1.[9] The notion that Capernaum was the center of the Galilean activity of Jesus must, however, be questioned historically.[10]

The people in Jesus' environment make this picture concrete: The first disciples called are fishermen from the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1.16-20); in Mark 2.14 we encounter a toll collector named Levi (in Matt 9.9 he is called Matthew); in Matt 8 and Luke 7 Jesus meets a centurion in Capernaum, who has even built a synagogue there for the Jewish people according to Luke 7.5. Often there is simply a mention of the crowd that gathers when it becomes known that Jesus is present.

Opponents of Jesus also come into view and indicate that his activity is viewed with skepticism by the representatives of the Jewish "religious parties" and even leads to them wanting to do away with him. In Galilee he meets Pharisees and scribes; in Matthew there are also occasional appearances of the Sadducees, who first appear in Jerusalem in Mark and Luke.[11] In two passages, supporters of the Herodian royal house (the so-called "Herodians") are mentioned, who evidently join forces with the Pharisees in their plans against Jesus.[12] After the death of Herod the Great (4 BCE) his son ruled in Galilee as well as in Perea, which was located to the east of the Jordan and was not geographically connected with Galilee. Antipas comes into view on various occasions but apparently never encounters Jesus directly.[13] He learns, however, of Jesus' activity, perceives it to be just as explosive as that of John the Baptist, and therefore also wishes to get him out of the way (Mark 6.14-16; Luke 13.13-33).

If Herod the Great mainly concentrated his remarkable building activity on Judea and Jerusalem,[14] then Antipas initiated various building projects in Galilee and thereby stimulated the economic situation. In the course of this building activity the two most important Galilean cities—Sepphoris and Tiberias—were rebuilt or newly founded.

Sepphoris is already of special interest for Jesus research due to its geographical position approximately 3.7 miles (6 kilometers) northwest of Nazareth, and it has recently attracted correspondingly great attention to itself.[15] At the time of Jesus the city had an eventful history behind it: after the death of Herod the Great, a Galilean by the name of Judas organized a revolt in the region of Sepphoris, which was put down by Roman military forces under the direction of Quintilius Varus, whose cohorts are said to have been wiped out by the Germans a few years later in the Teutoburg Forest. In the wake of the punitive action, Sepphoris was destroyed by a military force under the direction of his son and his friend Gaius.[16]

Thus, Antipas had every reason to incorporate Sepphoris in his building projects, all the more so since Tiberias was not even founded yet at this point in time. In the rebuilding project Sepphoris was developed into a magnificent city, which Josephus calls the "showpiece of all Galilee" (*Ant.* 18.27). A craftsman from Nazareth probably had good possibilities for work and profit here. Sometimes it is even hypothesized that Jesus was one of the workers who built the theater that was discovered in the excavations in Sepphoris and that he came into contact with Greek language and culture in this way.[17] This hypothesis, however, is uncertain, since the theater is usually dated to the time after Jesus.[18] Irrespective of this matter, one can start from the assumption that the first decades of the rule of Antipas brought an economic upturn in Galilee and with this also positions for employment and social stability.[19] We do not, however, learn whether Jesus practiced his occupation for a long time—and if he did, where this took place. The sources are not interested in him as a craftsman but as the founder of a community that lives according to the order of the reign of God.

The geographical horizon widens through episodes that take place in the regions that border on Galilee: Jesus goes into the Decapolis, the group of cities east of the Jordan that do not belong to the Jewish area (Mark 5.1-20; 7.31), into the area of Tyre and Sidon, thus into the west coast region (Mark 7.24-30), as well as into the area of Caesarea Philippi in the north (Mark 8.27). Together with Jerusalem and its environs, where the Passion events will later take place, the geographical framework of the activity of Jesus is thereby marked out.

Thus, the origin and beginnings of his activity show Jesus to be a Galilean Jew who was primarily active in the region around the Sea of Galilee, but who also went into the surrounding regions. What does this mean with respect to the cultural milieu of his activity?[20]

Let us begin with a consideration of the natural conditions. Galilee is a region with fruitful soil. Agriculture and also fishing at the Sea of Galilee present important sources of income at the time of Jesus. In Josephus' *Jewish War* this reads as follows:

> All Galilee is fruitful and rich in pastures; it is planted with trees of every sort. Even those who would otherwise have little joy in working the land are encouraged to work the land by its abundance. For this reason its inhabitants have completely cultivated the land and there is no wasteland at all there. The cities lie close to each other and the population of the villages is numerous everywhere because of the fruitfulness of the soil, so that even the smallest villages have at least 15,000 inhabitants. (*J.W.* 3.35, 41–43)

Especially the area around the sea, where the Galilean activity of Jesus mainly took place, is fruitful land. Once again Josephus:

> Along the Sea of Gennesaret there extends a land with the same name that is admirable in nature and in beauty. Because of the richness of the soil it permits every kind of plant, and therefore its inhabitants have indeed cultivated them all; the mild climate is also suitable for the most varied plants. Walnut trees that need especially cool weather in comparison with all other plants flourish there luxuriantly in great number. Alongside them stand palm trees that need heat; in addition fig trees and olive trees are in the immediate vicinity for which a milder climate is appropriate. One could speak of a competition of nature that mightily strains to bring together all of its opposites into one place or of a noble battle of the seasons, each of which competitively struggles for this region. The soil not only produces the most varied fruit that one can scarcely imagine together, but it also provides ripe fruits for a long time. It bestows the most royal among them, grapes and figs, for ten months without interruption; the remaining fruits bit by bit throughout the whole year. For besides the mild weather, the irrigation by a very powerful spring, which is called Capernaum by the inhabitants, also contributes to the fruitfulness of this region. (*J.W.* 3.516–20)

When the first disciples of Jesus are fishermen from the Sea of Galilee and when in the parables of the Gospels we encounter a sower, seed that grows as of itself, a tiny mustard seed that becomes a great shrub, weeds among wheat, a vineyard owner, and people who work in the vineyard, then we see here a reflection of the living environment of Galilee.

Geographically Galilee is divided into the mountainous Upper Galilee in the north and Lower Galilee in the south.[21] Lower Galilee can be subdivided again into the hilly west and the region around the Sea of Galilee in the east.[22] Cultural characteristics correspond to these regions. Upper Galilee can be characterized as "conservative, rural, Semitic, and predominantly Jewish,"[23] which does not apply in the same way for Lower Galilee and the region around the sea—the area of Jesus' activity. Lower Galilee was also predominantly populated by Jews, and this region was largely characterized by rural areas with smaller locales. However, the two cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias were also located here, which had an influence on the social and economic circumstances of the region. The urban influence should not be overestimated here, for we are dealing—in comparison, for example, with Scythopolis/Bet She'an, Caesarea Maritima, or Tyre—with cities that had a much smaller population and less developed urban structures.[24] Both cities were also predominantly Jewish in character, and thus cannot be appealed to in support of the thesis of a pagan influence in Galilee.[25]

Nevertheless, the rebuilding of Sepphoris and the somewhat later founding of Tiberias altered the social fabric of the region.[26] As was common in antiquity, an area of villages in which the necessary goods were produced belonged to the two cities.[27] Thus, the cities created a prosperous economic environment and simultaneously served as markets for goods from the country. On the other hand, conditions of forced labor and debt arose, and the slope between those who were well-to-do and those who were dependent became steeper.[28] The opposition between poor and rich in the Jesus tradition explains itself against this background: poor people, hungry people, and people who mourn are declared blessed; the wilderness preacher John is contrasted with the rich in soft clothing who live in palaces; there is talk of conditions of debt and of day laborers who search for work. It cannot be doubted that the situation in Galilee under Antipas is reflected here.

Galilee maintained trade relations with the surrounding regions, which were made easier by a well-developed road network. A branch of the Via Maris, one of the main Roman roads, ran through Galilee, branched there once again, and connected Sepphoris and Tiberias to the international road network. The discovery in Upper and Lower Galilee of coins minted in Tyre and the discovery of pottery from the Galilean villages Kefar Hananyah (on the border between Upper and Lower Galilee) and Shikhin (near Sepphoris) in various regions of Galilee, but also in Golan, Akko, and Caesarea Philippi, confirm that the Galilean villages were integrated into a wide-reaching network of connections with cities inside and outside of Galilee (see Map 1 in the appendix).[29] Thus, the Jesus movement arose in a Jewish area that was characterized by many villages and a small number of cities and was in active exchange with the surrounding non-Jewish areas.

The Gospels mediate a picture of the conditions at the time of Jesus that can be reconciled well with these findings: When the disciples are sent into cities (*poleis*) to preach there (QLk 7.32; 11.43), when there is mention of marketplaces (*agorai*: QLk 7.32; 11.43), streets (*plateiai*: Matt 6.5; Luke 10.10; 13.26; 14.21), banking transactions and debt conditions (QLk 19.23; Matt 6.12; 18.23-34; Luke 16.3-7), merchants (Matt 13.45), and courts and prisons (QLk 12.57-59; Matt 18.30), this points to connections to the urban milieu of the Jesus movement. When Jesus goes into the Decapolis or into the coastal regions in order to be active there, then this is plausible in the 20s of the first century, whereas it is scarcely imaginable for the time of the emergence of the Gospels, which were written in immediate proximity to the Jewish-Roman war of 66–70.[30] If one adds the fact that Jews also lived outside of the Jewish areas (for example in Scythopolis, which belonged to the Decapolis),[31] then the assumption that Jesus was active in these regions increases further in plausibility. Thus, when the authors of the Gospels look back at the activity of Jesus from a changed situation, their portrayals take into account the conditions that must be presupposed for the time of Jesus.

Thus, the Jesus movement cannot be explained against the background of an antagonism between urban and rural culture.[32] Neither the "rural" Jesus nor the social revolutionary corresponds to the picture that emerges from recent research on Galilee. It is indeed accurate that the relations between the cities and the rural regions of

Galilee did not proceed on an egalitarian basis, but rather that the life conditions for the rural population became worse through the politics of urbanization under Antipas. But the resulting conflicts play a role for the activity of Jesus only insofar as the politics of Antipas stood in competition to Jesus' proclamation of the claim of God on all Israel. When Jesus chooses twelve disciples as his closest disciples in a symbolic action and promises them that they will sit on the thrones of Israel (Mark 3.13-19; Q 22.28-30), when he proclaims the claim of God on Israel and therefore has the whole land in view in his activity, then it becomes clear that the societal conditions of Galilee are viewed from a perspective that regards Galilee as part of the land belonging to Israel. The Gospels do not show interest in the political or social constellation of Galilee independently of this viewpoint.

The conspicuous phenomenon that neither Sepphoris nor Tiberias is mentioned in the Gospels should also be placed in connection with this. Various explanations for this are discussed in the research. One hypothesis says that Jesus most certainly went into these cities, but the evangelists did not report on it because of his lack of success there. This solution is unsatisfactory inasmuch as the Gospels do not at all otherwise hide the fact that Jesus encountered unbelief and rejection. A second possibility would be that Jesus avoided Sepphoris and Tiberias because he knew himself to be sent to the Jewish population in the villages, whereas the cities, which were formed in a Hellenistic manner, represented a culture that was foreign to him. The thesis of an opposition between city and country that stands in the background, occasionally combined with a "Jewish versus Hellenistic" dichotomy, cannot be upheld. As the excavations have shown, Sepphoris was itself formed in a Jewish manner, and an opposition between Jewish and Hellenistic would in any case be anachronistic.

If then there is no apparent reason why the Gospels should have hidden a seeking out of the cities by Jesus, and if the thesis of an antagonism between city and country also proves to be unsustainable, then the reason must be sought in the orientation of the message of Jesus itself: he understood his activity as a renewal of Israel, as a gathering of those who belonged to the people of God and as the dawning of the reign of God, which could already be experienced in his actions. He saw the beginning of this renewal in the announcement of

salvation for the poor, in the feeding of the hungry, and in healing the sick. That he did not avoid cities in principle is shown by his appearance in Jerusalem, which is understandable against the background of the thematic orientation of his message.

The Jesus tradition also reveals a differentiated picture from a sociological perspective: Zebedee, who is mentioned in Mark 1.19-20, employs day laborers; James and John, who join the followers of Jesus, are thus sons of a small businessman. Fishing at the Sea of Galilee was a thoroughly productive line of business. This could also be indicated by the impressive size of the aforementioned boat from the Sea of Galilee.[33] Peter, who, as we saw, lived in the house of the family of his wife in Capernaum, says in Mark 10.28 that the disciples have left everything in order to follow Jesus. As shown by Jesus' answer, this concretely means family, houses, and fields. The Jesus movement was not a movement of the poor from the land but a renewal movement whose innermost circle consisted of people who belonged neither to the politically and economically powerful nor to those without possessions.

With respect to the religious conditions, it must be affirmed that in the north and the west Galilee bordered on the Phoenician coastal plain; in the east it bordered on the Decapolis, a group of Hellenistic cities that even reached with Scythopolis and its environment into the area to the west of the Jordan; in the south it bordered on Samaria. On account of the new settlement of foreigners by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE, the inhabitants of Samaria represented a mixed population that the Jews did not recognize as equal in status and that possessed its own translation of the Jewish law and its own place of worship on Mount Gerizim, which was destroyed by the Jews around 112 BCE.

The special position of the Samaritans is reflected in the New Testament: in Luke 9.51-55 the disciples of Jesus would have liked to destroy an inhospitable Samaritan village with fire from heaven; in John 8.48 Jesus is accused of being a Samaritan and being possessed by a demon; in the conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4 it is explicitly stressed that Jews do not have dealings with Samaritans. Therefore, the fact that it is precisely a Samaritan who helps the person who falls among robbers in the parable in Luke 10—in contrast to the priest and Levite who are coming from the temple service—represents a special provocation.

Figure 5.2
*Division of the kingdom of Herod the Great under his sons Antipas, Philip, and Archelaus (4 BCE).*
*Re-creation by Rachel Smith.*

Galilee was thus divided geographically from the Jewish heartland in the south; it had its own history; its inhabitants could already be distinguished from those of Judaea by their accent. The reason for this constellation was the new ordering of the eastern Mediterranean area by the Roman general Pompey. He reduced the size of the Jewish territory: he separated out both the Hellenistic cities of the coastal plain and the cities in the land east of the Jordan (including Scythopolis, which was located to the west of the Jordan) from the Jewish territory, which thus consisted of Judea, Galilee, and Perea (cf. Map 2 in the appendix). After the death of Herod the Great, his area was divided up among his sons (fig. 5.2):[34] Antipas ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 BCE until he was banished by the Roman emperor

Gaius Caligula in 39 CE; Philip ruled from 4 BCE to 33 CE over the regions that bordered Galilee to the north. Samaria, Judea, and Idumea were first assigned to Archelaus, a third son of Herod, but he was deposed again by Augustus ten years later on account of the cruelty of his reign.[35] From 6 CE his region stood under the administration of a Roman prefect who resided in Caesarea Maritima. This is also the reason why Pontius Pilate, who held the prefecture from 26 to 36 CE, presided and pronounced the death sentence in the trial of Jesus.

The geographical position of Galilee does not, however, mean that its inhabitants were therefore "less Jewish" than the inhabitants of Judea. In fact, the opposite is more likely to have been the case: the Galileans placed special value on the strict keeping of the purity regulations. It is noteworthy, for example, that in the previously mentioned Kefar Hananyah, tableware was produced that especially complied with Jewish purity requirements and therefore was also exported to other regions. The episode in Josephus about the list of John of Gischala also points in this direction.

Josephus reports that John had all the oil from Galilean Gischala brought to Caesarea Philippi—allegedly because the Jewish inhabitants there had entreated him to obtain pure oil in order that they would not need to use Greek oil. In truth, however, John only pretended to do this, because he knew that he could sell the oil there for much more of a profit than in Gischala, where it only had a tenth of the value (*Life* 74–75). This episode shows, if we overlook for a moment the moral components about which Josephus is indignant, that the Jews of Caesarea evidently knew where to turn in order to obtain oil that complied with the Jewish purity regulations.

When there is talk of a "Galilee of the Gentiles" in both Isa 8.23 (cf. Matt 5.14) and 1 Macc 5.15, then this should not be understood to mean that Galilee was a pagan region at the time of Jesus. The history of the region already speaks against this view: the archaeological findings have shown that the Assyrian conquest around 722/721 BCE led to an almost complete depopulation of Galilee. It was only through the Jewish line of the Maccabees, more precisely through Aristobulus I (104–103 BCE), that Galilee was reconquered from the Seleucids, who were ruling at the time, and integrated into the Jewish region (cf. Map 3 in the appendix). This was connected with an intensive Jewish settlement of Galilee, which is attested by the excavations of

the settlements that emerged anew at this time and by the pottery and coin findings.[36] Thus, the conception of a "Galilee of the Gentiles" is completely without foundation for the time of Jesus.[37] Rather, the aforementioned passages must be understood to mean that Isaiah thereby alludes to the conquest of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians; 1 Maccabees asserts a claim over all Israel with an expression borrowed from Isaiah, thus with a biblical one; and the Gospel of Matthew looks ahead to the Gentile mission as the consequence of the activity of Jesus. By contrast, the view that a considerable portion of the population in Galilee was made up of Gentiles cannot be established by any of these passages.

Finally, consideration must be given to the political circumstances in Palestine. The notion of Galilee as a resistance center in the fight against the Roman order is a myth that has been handed down even into the most recent portrayals of Jesus. It is based in large part on the information of Josephus, who in his portrayal gives the impression that the various revolts in Galilee or under the leadership of Galileans were connected with one another and led directly to the revolt in 66–70 CE. In actuality they were completely different events that must be assigned to different historical constellations.

The aforementioned revolt of Judas the Galilean—who after the death of Herod the Great gathered a crowd of followers around himself in Sepphoris, raided the armory of the city, and staged a revolt—is part of a whole series of disturbances that according to Josephus took hold of not only Galilee but all Palestine. Therefore, it is also not Galilee but (all) Judea that is referred to as a "cave of bandits" (*Ant.* 17.285). When in about 6 CE a certain Judas (possibly the same one as before) campaigned against the obligation to pay taxes to the Romans, then his Galilean origin says nothing about the conditions in Galilee. When in ca. 44 CE two sons of Judas led a revolt, then this revolt already lay after the time of Jesus and Antipas. By contrast, no disturbances are attested for the period of Antipas' reign. The sources report only a conflict with the Nabatean king Aretas, which arose, however, after the time of Jesus. Antipas, however, appears to have shown consideration for the Jewish people in his domestic policy: he did not construct a pagan temple, and there are no images of gods or emperors on the coins minted during his reign. Galilee apparently experienced a period of stability and inner peace during his reign.[38] This was first

changed by the events connected with the first Jewish-Roman war (66–70 CE), in which many Galilean locations were also involved.

Attention must also be given to the fact that Galilee—in contrast to Judea and Samaria—was not occupied by Roman troops until ca. 120 CE. Thus, Galilee was not a breeding ground for the resistance against foreign rule. This is significant for the activity of Jesus insofar as he did not appear in a region that was exposed to a direct confrontation with the Romans.

If we summarize these findings, then the following becomes clear: the Galilean origin of Jesus means that he came from a Jewish family and grew up in an environment that was Jewish in character. Galileans spoke their own dialect;[39] they were inhabitants of a region that was predominantly rural in character, whose religious and political leadership was located in Jerusalem and whose religious center and frequent pilgrimage destination was the temple there. At the time of Jesus, Galilee was shaped by the politics of Antipas who showed respect for its Jewish character, but had it on lease from Rome and for his part leased it out again. This was irreconcilable with the notion of the land that was leased to Israel by God and to which therefore the regulations of the law of Israel had to be applied. Therefore, a conflict between Antipas and Jesus probably ignited at this point, since Jesus' proclamation of the dawning reign of God represented a competing model to the reign of Antipas.

With the founding of Sepphoris and Tiberias, Antipas provided an economic and cultural upswing. The aforementioned social tensions must be interpreted above all against this background. This is not to dispute that the activity of Jesus could also give rise to hopes related to a change in the political order. It was decisive, however, that in his activity hope was tied to the fulfillment of the prophetic promises of eschatological peace.

# 6

# A Jew from Galilee

## *The Jew*

The placement of Jesus in his Jewish environment can be regarded as the most important characteristic feature of recent Jesus research. At first glance this may be surprising. That Jesus was a Jew appears self-evident, even if this—as shown above—was not always taken to be the case. But even when the Jewish origin of Jesus was presupposed, the underlying picture of Judaism was by no means always a differentiated one. Rather, Judaism often served, especially in older portrayals, to show supposedly far-reaching differences from Jesus, who then appeared as the one who "overcame" Judaism. In another model Jesus himself was still assigned to Judaism, but Christianity was portrayed as a movement that clearly differed from Judaism.

Both models are unsatisfactory. They work with stereotypes that oppose Christianity and Judaism to each other in an undifferentiated manner. It is obvious that the movement founded by Jesus subsequently separated from Judaism. It can, however, be ruled out that he intended such a development. The activity of Jesus was aimed at the renewal of Israel and precisely not at a community separated from Israel. It is, however, also indisputable that Jesus initiated developments that led to the separation of Judaism and Christianity. Nevertheless, the activity of Jesus can be adequately understood only within the Judaism of his time. Recent scholarship has emphatically made us aware of this

fact by painting a vivid picture of the Judaism of the time of Jesus on the basis of the literary and archaeological witnesses. In the process, the negative picture of an inflexible religion of law has been shown to be a projection that in no way does justice to the historical findings.[1] In this chapter we turn first to the general characteristics of Judaism and then bring the picture into sharper focus with a consideration of the Jewish "parties."

## Jesus in the "Common Judaism" of His Time

Jesus shared, of course, the fundamental convictions of Judaism.[2] At the center stood the belief in the one God who chose Israel, made a covenant with Israel, and gave Israel the law as the content of this covenant. This confession of the one God, as it is recorded in Deut 6.4-7, was spoken every morning and every evening. The most important traditions of Israel and Judaism are recorded in the three parts of the Jewish Bible—Law, Prophets, Psalms and Other Writings.[3] These include the following traditions: According to Gen 17, the circumcision of the male descendants is the sign of the covenant and corresponds to God's promise to Abraham that he would make him the father of many nations and give him the whole land of Canaan. One may not work on the Sabbath, for this day was dedicated to God (Exod 20.8-11; Deut 5.12-15). The central place for the worship of God was the Jerusalem temple. The religious life of Judaism did not represent a special sphere but rather shaped daily life in manifold ways.

The milieu that Jesus grew up in and that shaped him was determined by these Jewish traditions. In light of the view, which has long been conventional in Christian theology, that Jesus allegedly adopted a negative stance toward the Jewish law, one must clearly stress that in Judaism the law was and is guidance for a life according to the will of God. The law was thus the positive heart of the religion and by no means an oppressive system of regulations.[4] Therefore, in the controversies in the Jesus tradition it is also always a matter of the *right understanding* of the law, whereas its *fundamental validity* is not in question.[5]

The decisive characteristics of the activity of Jesus must be understood against this background: with his talk of the dawning reign of

God he places a Jewish symbol at the center of his activity; with his interpretation of the law he enters into a controversial Jewish discussion; with the establishment of the circle of the twelve, his turning to outsiders, and his programmatic activity in Jerusalem he places his activity under the sign of the renewal of Israel. The special position of Israel among the nations is always presupposed and is nowhere called into question.[6]

If we narrow the historical context further, then we strike upon the history of Judaism in the Hellenistic-Roman period. "Hellenistic" (from "Hellas," i.e., Greece) here refers to the influence of Greek language and culture. This spread as a consequence of the conquests of Alexander the Great (starting in 334 BCE) throughout the entire Mediterranean sphere, thus also into Judaism: the writings of Israel were translated into Greek as the so-called "Septuagint";[7] newly emerging writings were directly composed in Greek; Greek architecture and ways of life also made their arrival in Judaism.

At the time of Jesus, the majority of Jews lived not in Palestine but in other lands of the "dispersion" (Diaspora). For the activity of Jesus, however, the history of Judaism in Palestine is relevant. In the period after Alexander the Great, the region was first ruled by the Ptolemies from Egypt and then by the Seleucid dynasty from Syria. The Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE) forced the Hellenization of Judea: the practice of the Jewish religion was forbidden; an altar dedicated to Olympian Zeus was erected in the Jerusalem temple in the place of the altar for burnt offerings. If the opening in relation to Greek culture was previously controversial in Judaism, then a conservative response now gained the upper hand in reaction to these violent measures: the military struggle of the Maccabees, also called Hasmoneans, led to the liberation of Jerusalem and to the rededication of the temple in 164 BCE; Judea regained its independence; the conquests of the Maccabees led to an expansion of the Jewish territory, into which Samaria and Galilee in the north, Idumea in the south, and the land to the east of the Jordan were integrated (cf. Map 3 in the appendix). In this way the region of the people of twelve tribes was restored to its original extent.

The aforementioned conquest of Palestine by Pompey ended the rule of the Maccabees in 64/63 BCE. It is true that under Herod the Great and his descendants there were phases of temporally and

regionally limited independence. But dependence on the favor of Rome was always beyond question and necessitated subservience to Roman rule.[8]

But the consciousness of a distinctive Jewish identity that arose in the Maccabean period, which was oriented to the covenant and law and directed to the Jerusalem temple, remained alive, as did the Jewish traditions emerging in this period that found expression in writings of an apocalyptic or sapiential character.[9]

## Jesus and the Jewish "Parties"

Thus, the Judaism of Galilee and Judea that is to be presupposed for the time of Jesus experienced its fundamental shaping in the Maccabean period. This also includes the "parties" that emerged in this phase of Judaism. While it is true that the majority of the Jews did not directly belong to any of these parties, they nevertheless played an important role for the political and religious life of Judaism in Palestine. Beyond this they mediate a glimpse into the organization and religious constellation in Judaism at the time of Jesus. A difficulty in describing the profile of these groups more exactly resides, however, in the fact that we do not have witnesses that can be clearly identified as self-witnesses for any of them. It is true that attempts have repeatedly been made in scholarship to assign certain Jewish writings to one of these groups. As a rule, however, the indications for such an attribution are not unambiguous. This also applies to the Qumran writings, to which we will need to return. For the portrayal of these groups we must therefore rely on witnesses that describe them from an outsider perspective. In such reports there is mention of the groups of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Therapeutai, the party of Judas the Galilean, and the community of Qumran.[10] Of these groups, only the Pharisees and Sadducees are encountered in the New Testament. But in order to take the Judaism of the time of Jesus into view, we must take a look at all of these groups.

In the first place, we have information from Josephus. In book 13 of his *Jewish Antiquities* we find two short references in different contexts (*Ant*. 13.171–73, 297–98), and another in his autobiography (*Life* 12). Two longer reports with more precise information then occur in

book 2 of the *Jewish War* (*J.W.* 2.118–66) and in a later passage in the *Jewish Antiquities* (*Ant.* 18.11–25). In all of these passages Josephus names three "parties" (*haireseis*), namely Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The two more detailed reports mention another party in addition, which is said to have been founded by the Galilean Judas (*Ant.* 18.9–10, 23–25; *J.W.* 2.118). It is said to resemble the Pharisees, but to distinguish itself through a particular desire for freedom, which also does not shrink back from killing relatives or from one's own death. This group is later than the others, having emerged in the first years of the first century CE. Thus, it already existed at the time of Jesus' public activity.[11]

The concern of Josephus to characterize these groups according to the model of Greek philosophical schools is clearly recognizable: he explicitly compares the Essenes to the Pythagoreans in one passage (*Ant.* 15.371), and the Pharisees to the Stoics in another (*Life* 12); for the Sadducees he appears to suggest an analogy with the Epicureans, and he calls the party of Judas the "fourth philosophy." This stylization urges restraint as a matter of principle in relation to drawing direct historical conclusions from these reports.

Josephus describes the Pharisees as people who know many other commands of the oral tradition beyond the law that is fixed in writing, who are regarded as informed interpreters of the law, and who concern themselves with the proper observance of the instructions on worship, prayer, and sacrifice. They are said to believe in fate and the immortality of the soul and to have great favor with the people. The Sadducees, by contrast, are said to regard the written law alone as authoritative, to deny fate, and not to believe in a continued existence of the soul after death. They are said to have only a few adherents among the people and therefore to be dependent on the support of the Pharisees in the exercise of offices. Finally, the Essenes, with whom Josephus deals at length in book 2 of the *Jewish War*, are said to be distinguished by a special ethic: they are said to despise possessions and marriage, to have their own books and religious rituals, such as, for example, washings and meals, and to regard it as wrong to have slaves. They are also said to believe in the immortality of souls, to attend strictly to the keeping of the Sabbath, and to venerate God and the lawgiver (Moses) in an especially strict manner.

There are additional witnesses about the Essenes alongside the witness of Josephus: Philo mentions them in his writing *That Every Good Person Is Free* (75–91), then in the first, lost part of the writing *On the Contemplative Life*, and finally in another writing titled *Hypothetica: Apology for the Jews*, which is handed down in the church historian Eusebius.[12] In the first-named writing, Philo reports that the Essenes (he calls them Essaioi, which he connects with the Greek word for "holiness") would live only in villages and would avoid cities in order not to come into contact with the profligacy there. They are said to possess only what is necessary for life, to produce no weapons, and to have no slaves since they were convinced of the equality of all human beings. In addition, Philo stresses that they intensively occupy themselves with ethics, whereas they leave logic and natural philosophy to others. In the *Apology*, Philo mentions the communitarian way of life of the Essenes, but now speaks of the fact that they live in cities and larger villages and completely reject marriage.

Another witness is found in the Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE). In his *Natural History* (5.73), he reports that the Essenes lived to the west of the Dead Sea, above (or north of) the city of Engada (En Gedi). They are said to be a tribe that did not have women and money and lived only in the society of palm trees, and one that was constantly renewed through the newcomers who arrived daily. In this way, still according to Pliny, there is an explanation for the unbelievable fact that a tribe in which no one is born has continued to exist for centuries.

We know of the so-called "Therapeutai" only from Philo's writing *On the Contemplative Life*, in which he deals with this group after his description of the Essenes. He depicts the Therapeutae, as he also does in the case of the Essenes, in an idealizing manner. They are said to live in isolation all over Egypt; their way of life is said to be ascetic and completely devoted to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, to prayer, and to the composition of hymns. A detailed description is also then given of their religious meal, at which they fall into ecstasy at the end and through which they are said to come into direct contact with God.

The Pharisees play the most important role for the activity of Jesus. This group, which presumably arose from the pious (*Hasidim*) of the Maccabean period, came into conflict with the Maccabees when

the Maccabees increasingly behaved as political-military rulers. In the first century BCE they obtained renewed political influence. At the time of Jesus they were represented in the Sanhedrin, which presumably acted as the Jerusalem high council. The Pharisees were especially concerned to ensure that daily life was carried out precisely according to the regulations of the Mosaic law. For this purpose they developed diverse interpretations that were intended to secure Jewish identity through the preservation of the law. Pharisees known by name are Paul (cf. Phil 3.5-6) and also Josephus himself, according to his own presentation.[13] The self-witness of Paul—even if it is formulated while looking back at his conversion to Christ—is of interest here, since it establishes a connection between belonging to the Pharisees and being blameless in the righteousness required by the law. After the reorganization of Judaism in the last third of the first century, the Pharisees were the group that obtained the greatest influence within the rabbinic Judaism that was emerging.

According to the Gospels, the Pharisees turned up especially in Galilee. Whether Pharisees lived there or whether alternatively they occasionally came from Judea or Jerusalem to Galilee, as Mark 7.1 (cf. also 3.22: scribes) appears to assume, cannot be determined with certainty. In light of the strict piety of the Galilean country population, however, one can imagine without difficulty that they found favor there.

In the New Testament, the Pharisees are mostly opponents of Jesus, mainly in questions of the law, though significantly not in the Passion events. They particularly pay attention to the keeping of the purity regulations. In this respect they stand in contrast with Jesus' view of purity. This conflict paradigmatically surfaces in Mark 7.1-23: the Pharisees do not touch any food if they have not previously cleansed their hands (7.2-4); Jesus, by contrast, declares food to be clean in principle (7.18-19). We will return to these different concepts of purity at a later point.[14] In other passages they entangle Jesus in discussions about the interpretation of regulations of the law (Mark 10.2-9) and carefully observe whether he keeps the Sabbath commandment (Mark 2.23-28; 3.1-6; Luke 14.1-5). It is no accident that in the Gospel of Matthew, as an introduction to his interpretation of the law in the so-called antitheses, Jesus summons his hearers to a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5.20).

When in another place the Pharisees are accused of seeking honor and a merely external law observance (Luke 11.39-43/Matt 23.3-7, 23-28), when Luke even refers to them as lovers of money (Luke 16.14), and when they already resolve to kill Jesus in Galilee according to the Gospel of Mark (Mark 3.6), then this is a matter of early Christian polemic that does not yield much for a historical profile of the Pharisees. By contrast, it is probable that the Pharisees, already on account of their popularity and their influence among the people, were competition for the Jesus movement. This is based above all in their view of the role of the law, which, as will become clear, represented an alternative to the position advocated by Jesus and his followers.

The Sadducees, who are also mentioned in the New Testament, have a different historical background. They emerged from the Jerusalem temple hierarchy and possibly traced themselves back to the priest Zadok. In the Maccabean period they stood in opposition to the Pharisees with whom they also differed in their teaching (a point that is reflected in the New Testament, for example in Mark 12.18 and Acts 23.6-9). At the time of Jesus, they were also represented in the Sanhedrin and presumably often supplied the high priest. In opposition to the Pharisees, who can be characterized as a lay movement, the Sadducees represented a conservative upper-class party that was mainly composed of priestly families and was oriented toward the Jerusalem temple and the high priesthood.

The placement together of Pharisees and Sadducees in the Gospel of Matthew is secondary and shows that the Sadducees no longer played an independent role after the destruction of the temple.[15] The remaining references to the Sadducees refer to confrontations in Jerusalem, which corresponds to the conditions at the time of Jesus. As a priestly dynasty the Sadducees were at home in Jerusalem. Jesus probably came into conflict with them primarily in connection with the question of the significance of the temple.

The Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament. In light of the extensive portrayal of them in Josephus as well as the references to this group in Philo and Pliny, this may be surprising. This absence could be explained by inferring that Jesus did not come into contact with them because they were not located in the villages around the Sea of Galilee, which was Jesus' sphere of activity. In light of the clearly idealized presentation of this group in Josephus and Philo it

is also difficult—as is also the case with the Therapeutai—to get to secure historical ground.

## Excursus
## Essenes in Qumran

The first Qumran scrolls were accidentally discovered by Bedouins in a cave on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea (the cave that has been assigned the number 1 today). By various paths they came somewhat later into the hands of Eliezer Sukenik, who was then teaching at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He recognized their significance and thus initiated interest in the scrolls. As a result, systematic excavations were undertaken in the entire region from 1949 to 1956. In the process approximately forty thousand fragments from about seven hundred scrolls were discovered in Qumran in eleven caves. Additional texts were found in other locations in the Judean desert, for example at Masada and in Nahal Hever. In German these texts were mostly subsumed—somewhat misleadingly—under the name "Qumran writings." In English, by contrast, the more appropriate designation "Dead Sea Scrolls" is used.

While longer texts have been found among the scrolls from Qumran (for example the famous, almost complete Isaiah scroll), in most cases we are dealing with partially preserved, often very small fragments with only a few words or letters. The texts that have been found include numerous copies of biblical texts; texts that are assigned today to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (e.g., fragments of *Jubilees*, Tobit, Jesus Sirach, and *1 Enoch*); commentaries on biblical texts; and finally Jewish writings of differing character that deal with questions of law interpretation, liturgy, the end time, or with questions concerning purity or calendars. This final category of writings includes, for example, the so-called *Rule of the Community* from cave 1 (1QS),[16] the *War Scroll* (1QM), and the *Thanksgiving Hymns* (1QH). In the immediate proximity of the caves there is also a settlement that had already been known about for some time but was now brought into connection with the caves.

There has been intense discussion surrounding the interpretation of the Qumran findings for a long time.[17] An initial, extremely

influential interpretation was developed by Eliezer Sukenik, who has already been mentioned, and by Roland de Vaux, a Dominican priest and director of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem who directed the excavations from 1949 to 1956. In the first place, Sukenik brought the Essenes, who were previously known from ancient literature, into connection with the authors or users of the scrolls. But at that time only a limited number of scrolls had been discovered. Thus, the theory of the Essene character of a number of Qumran writings was not a theory developed in the light of the extensive material known to us today.[18] De Vaux went one step further on the basis of the results of his excavations: according to him, the Essenes were not only the authors of the scrolls, but the settlement of Qumran was inhabited by Essenes. They had withdrawn into the wilderness as a result of their opposition to the Jerusalem temple in order to live out an ascetic pious life there, understanding themselves to be the nucleus of the Israel that must be renewed. De Vaux derived the rules of the life of this community from the corresponding scrolls, and especially from the aforementioned *Rule of the Community* (1QS).

If this interpretation were accurate, then some of the Qumran scrolls would describe the teaching and religious life of the community living in the settlement and simultaneously provide information about the ancient Jewish group of the Essenes. In this case, one would thus have a self-witness of the Essenes and not an idealizing description by an outsider such as in Pliny the Elder, Philo, and Josephus.[19] For the connection between the Qumran findings and the Essenes one appealed first to the aforementioned witness of Pliny, who localized the Essenes on the Dead Sea to the north of En Gedi, thus to the area where the caves with the scrolls and the Qumran settlement were found, and second to the supposed affinities between the life depicted in the scrolls and the findings of the settlement (for example their isolated location, the pottery that was discovered, allegedly special forms of burial, and so forth). These could be brought into connection at a number of points with the depiction of the Essenes in Josephus, who mentions their community of goods, entry rites, ritual meals, and purity rituals.

The interpretation of Sukenik and de Vaux, which has characterized Qumran research for a long time, has, however, been called into question in recent scholarship.[20] Both the connection of the Qumran

settlement to the scrolls from the caves and the interpretation of the settlement and scrolls as witnesses of a group of Essenes can by no means be regarded as certain. The new phase that Qumran research is entering into at present and that presumably will supplant the old paradigm has been substantially sparked off by the archaeological research on the Qumran settlement. The most important newer results include the following: Josephus, Philo, and Pliny report about the Essenes' life without marriage. This was also assumed for the residents of the Qumran settlement. It speaks against this, however, that there is no mention of such a regulation in the Qumran texts and that graves of women and children are also found at the Qumran cemetery.[21] The findings of the numerous water basins in Qumran, which are often interpreted as indications of the special significance of purity regulations, give rise to a more differentiated picture: first, the basins do not all come from the same period; second, at least some of them were apparently used to cleanse clay from which ceramic vessels, which were found in great number in Qumran, were produced. Thus, it cannot be deduced from the archaeological findings that the inhabitants of the Qumran settlement observed the Jewish purity regulations in an especially strict manner. It could also not be satisfactorily explained up to now why an Essene group should have kept such a large number of scrolls in caves around their settlement that were partially difficult to access and that often included numerous copies of the same writing, whereas not a single piece of a scroll was found in the settlement itself. If one adds the fact that texts were also discovered in other regions of the Jewish wilderness, as mentioned above, then this could speak for a different interpretation of the Qumran findings: the difficult-to-access Jewish hill country could have served as a hiding place for texts that one wanted to preserve from destruction. Finally, the investigation of the infrastructure of the region of the Dead Sea also suggests that the Qumran settlement was integrated into the economic and settlement structure there and more likely functioned as an economic domain than as a refuge for religious settlers. The question of whether the scrolls and the settlement are at all connected therefore appears to be completely open.

The fact that the literary findings of the scrolls can be reconciled only within limits with the descriptions of the Essenes in the aforementioned sources also points in this direction. Thus, while it is true

that a number of the views that Philo and Josephus attribute to the Essenes are also found in the Qumran writings (such as, for example, a life in a community of goods), there are also differences. Here, one must in general take account of the fact that Philo and Josephus depict the Essenes in an idealizing manner. Both are interested in presenting these Jewish groups according to the model of a philosophical school with high ideals. Therefore, their depictions can be related to the historical reality only with caution.[22] Beyond this the differences to the literary and archaeological findings are unmistakable. Thus, one must, for example, pay attention to the fact that the reports in Philo and Josephus do not speak of an Essene settlement at the Dead Sea, but speak of the Essenes living dispersed throughout the entire land. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility that a group of Essenes also lived at the Dead Sea, but the indications for this are by no means compelling. Calendar questions play an important role in a number of Qumran writings, whereas they never do so in the reports about the Essenes. In the *War Scroll* (1QM) we find the expectation of an end-time battle of the "sons of light" against the "sons of darkness," whereas the Essenes are described as a decidedly peaceful community. A militant end-time expectation does not fit well with this depiction. The report of Pliny the Elder, who is the only one who locates the Essenes at the Dead Sea, does not fit together so easily with the Qumran texts with its description of an ascetic community of men.

These findings lead to two consequences: first, one must presumably differentiate more strongly between the settlement and the scrolls. That the scrolls are related to the life of a Jewish group that lived in the settlement next to the caves is by no means certain. The aforementioned variety of the writings could already speak for a stronger differentiation: alongside the interpretations of the biblical texts there are texts of a poetic-sapiential, eschatological-apocalyptic, and priestly-liturgical character. Therefore, the possibility has recently been considered that we are dealing with writings of various origins that were hidden in the caves near the Qumran settlement in the context of the intensifying conflict with the Romans. In this case, they would not be related to the life of a community living in the Qumran settlement. Therefore, neither the archaeological findings of the settlement nor the scrolls themselves are certain evidence for the thesis of an Essene community that inhabited the settlement and whose

theological convictions and religious practices can be reconstructed on the basis of the scrolls.

In light of these uncertainties, it is advisable to view the Qumran writings not as documents of a group of Essenes but as an expression of various convictions of the Judaism of the Hellenistic-Roman period. A number of the writings discovered in Qumran formulate rules for the life of a Jewish community in which the "Teacher of Righteousness" plays an elevated role. These include above all the already mentioned *Rule of the Community* (1QS). Even if it was not a matter of a group of Essenes, we encounter in these writings the profile of a priestly, apocalyptically oriented community that understood itself as the nucleus of an Israel that had to be renewed and purified itself from sins in representation of Israel. It was oriented not to the Jerusalem temple but to the expectation of a new temple. An important role was then played by calendar questions: the writings found in Qumran are oriented on a solar calendar that deviates from the official Jewish calendar. This means that the Jewish feasts were celebrated on different days than in mainstream Judaism.

A number of statements in these writings can be compared with statements of John the Baptist and Jesus that have been handed down. Mention must especially be made of the necessity of the renewal of all Israel, the expectation of a last judgment that is near, and the intensive appeal to the Holy Scriptures of Israel. Scripture citations (for example of prophecies from the book of Isaiah), with which the activity of John the Baptist or Jesus is interpreted in the New Testament, can also be shown in the Qumran writings. In some Qumran writings, there is a description of an end-time meal with bread and wine that is presided over by the high priest. Other texts show that the expectations for the end time included the appearance of a priestly and a kingly Anointed (Messiah).

One can, of course, also establish differences: in a number of writings the life of a cult community separated from the rest of the people is described, whereas Jesus was oriented to all the regions and classes of Israel. According to Jesus' self-understanding, the establishment of the reign of God begins with his activity, a view that finds no direct correspondence in the Qumran texts. The purifying baths mentioned in the Qumran writings differ from the baptism of John in the fact that John tied baptism exclusively to his person and proclaimed it as a

one-time act, whereas the washings in the Qumran texts are purifications that are to be repeated.

* * *

The group designated as the "fourth philosophy" by Josephus is not mentioned in the New Testament either. This too could simply be a result of the fact that it was not significant to the Jesus movement. According to the description of Josephus, the concern is with freedom fighters, who probably would then more likely appear in Judea than in Galilee, even if their leader Judas came from Galilee. It is possible that there are connections to the subsequently appearing groups of the Sicarii and the Zealots, but this already lies after the time of Jesus.

Alongside these groups, individual figures who wanted to assume political power or to lead the people as prophets or miracle workers appeared time and again. Josephus mentions such figures at many points.[23] In the context of the disturbances after the death of Herod the Great, people are said to have appeared in Galilee and Judea (among them also the previously mentioned Judas from Galilee) who wanted to usurp the kingly rule (*Ant*. 17.271–85). At the time of the Emperor Tiberius a prophet is said to have instigated a rebellion in Samaria (*Ant*. 18.85–87). Since the 40s various prophets then appeared and promised the people that they would perform miraculous deeds. But the Roman rulers took action against them in each case. The majority of these events lie after the time of Jesus. Therefore, they are more characteristic of the climate of the 40s, which became increasingly heated and led to the Jewish-Roman war. At the same time, they are of interest for the interpretation of the activity of Jesus because they could describe the milieu in which his activity—primarily in Judea and Jerusalem—was perceived by his Jewish contemporaries. It will be necessary to return to this point in connection with the Jerusalem events.

John the Baptist was also a prophetic-charismatic figure. With his person we enter the immediate field of activity of Jesus, who received decisive impulses for his own activity from John. Who was this John?

## John the Baptist

The notices about John the Baptist are sparse, so that the contours of his activity can be sketched only in outline.[24] Nevertheless, we have alongside the Christian witnesses an additional testimony by Flavius Josephus. Before we return to the latter, we turn first to the Gospels.

The birth and origin of John is narrated only by Luke, who reports his descent from a priestly line—his father, Zacharias, is a priest at the Jerusalem temple (Luke 1.1-25, 57-80). Even if there is much legendary material here, this information about his origin fits with the fact that John later withdrew into the wilderness and with his preaching of repentance propagated an alternative to the Jerusalem temple cult. The immersion in the Jordan was so characteristic that "Immerser"—or as it is translated today, "Baptist"—became the epithet of John, which is known by both Josephus and the Synoptics.[25]

Like the Pharisees and Jesus, John turned to all Israel with his message. His message is handed down in Matthew 3.7-10 and Luke 3.7-9, which they probably took from their common source Q. It reads,

> Brood of vipers! Who taught you that you could escape the coming wrath? Therefore, bring forth fruit that is worthy of repentance! And do not think to say to yourself: We have Abraham as our father. For I say to you: God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones.
>
> But the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree then that does bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
>
> I baptize you with water, but the one who comes after me is stronger than I am. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
>
> His winnowing fork is in his hand; and he will clean his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

At the center stands the urgency of repentance in light of the God who requires an account. This is expressed in a drastic image: an axe lies at the roots of the trees; shortly it will be raised to cut them down; only the demonstration of their "usefulness," namely their good fruit can still change their fate. Moreover, as a precaution John denies to his addressees an argument to which they could possibly appeal:

descent from Abraham, thus the belonging to God's covenant with Israel, does not in itself protect one from the judgment of God, but it does so only if the "bearing of good fruit" is added. The salvation history of Israel founded on the election of Abraham and tied to the removal of sins through the temple cult is thereby radically called into question. The coming judgment of God no longer allows a retreat to covenant and law; only repentance, thus a new turning to God and the consistent orientation to his will, can preserve one from the wrath of God. As a symbolic action for the sealing of this repentance John requires the immersion in the Jordan, which must be carried out by him on those who are willing to repent.

In the second part, John announces a "Stronger One" who will come after him. According to a Christian understanding, the concern is naturally with Jesus, whose forerunner John therefore became in the Christian tradition. This almost certainly did not correspond to John's self-understanding. John understood himself as the last prophet, who summoned Israel once more to repentance before the judgment of God, and not as a forerunner of another person who would appear in the name of God after him. Such an interpretation would scarcely be reconcilable with the image of the axe at the root of the trees. Rather, the "Stronger One" almost certainly means God himself about whose imminent coming John speaks. Before his judgment—his "baptism of fire"—takes place, John still offers the possibility of repentance—the "baptism of water."[26]

It is no accident that John chose the wilderness as the place of the announcement of this message: he appears at the Jordan, presumably in Perea, thus on the eastern side, where Israel once entered into the promised land.[27] John is also said to have been put to death later in Perea, which belonged to the area of Antipas. Like his preaching of repentance, this place is also full of symbolism: the wilderness is a place of withdrawal and of God's meeting with Israel, the place at which he once preserved his people and at which he will, according to prophetic announcement, meet it again in order to renew the relation to him. Therefore, the wilderness also points to the fundamental renewal of the relation of Israel to God that John required.

John can thus be characterized as a prophetic preacher of repentance who appeared with the message of the near judgment of God. It fits this that his behavior in the Gospels is described as that of a

prophet: John is said to have worn camel hair and a leather belt and to have eaten locusts and wild honey (Mark 1.6). That John appeared in this way is entirely plausible historically. In this way he underscores his message through his exterior by presenting himself in the tradition of the prophets of Israel. Concerning these too it is reported that they wore a mantle of hair, and with Elijah the leather belt is also mentioned.[28] When John is interpreted as the returning Elijah in the early Christian tradition,[29] this certainly could have corresponded to John's self-understanding: according to prophetic tradition, Elijah is supposed to come again before the day of judgment and reconcile fathers and sons with one another in order to avert the judgment of God on Israel in this way (Mal 3.23-24). This would fit well with the message with which John appeared.

How did people in Judea—and even in Galilee—hear about the wilderness preacher John? It is conceivable that his circle of disciples made his message known and people then decided to go out to him in the wilderness in order to let themselves be baptized.[30] The other possibility is that John himself was also active in various places.[31] A linguistic indication could support this view: in Matthew and Luke we encounter in the description of the activity of John the Baptist the expression "the whole Jordan region" (Matt 3.5/Luke 3.3). It is true that Matthew relates this to the *people* coming out to John, but this could have been caused by Mark 1.5 ("There went out to him the whole Jewish land and all the people of Jerusalem"). By contrast, the expression could have originally referred to the activity of John in the "whole Jordan region." In this way John could have become a known prophetic preacher of repentance among the Jews of Palestine.

The depiction of Josephus deviates from the picture of the Gospels in a way that is not insubstantial. The text reads,

> (116) Some of the Jews thought that Herod's army was destroyed by God who punished him in a very just manner in retribution for John, the so-called Baptist. (117) For Herod killed him although he was a good man who instructed the Jews to strive for virtue, to practice righteousness towards one another and piety towards God and then to come for baptism. For baptism appeared to him to be acceptable (to God), for it would be used not to atone for any sins but to purify the body, especially considering that the souls were already purified beforehand by an upright life.

> (118) When others also came together, for they were very agitated from hearing the words (of John), Herod feared that the great power of persuasion (of John) among the people could lead to some sort of rebellion—for they appeared to do everything according to his will—and he regarded it as much better to do away with him in advance before some innovations arose through him than to fall into difficulties after a revolution and to regret (not having acted earlier). (119) On the suspicion of Herod he (John) was brought to Machaerus as a prisoner—the fortress already mentioned—and put to death there. But the Jews were of the view that the downfall of the army took place as vengeance for that one (John), because God wanted to inflict harm on Herod. (*Ant*. 18.116–19)

In a manner similar to how Josephus portrayed the Jewish "parties" in an analogy to Greek philosophical schools, John also appears in Josephus as a philosophical teacher who instructs the people in virtue, righteousness, and piety. Baptism is thereby characterized as a cleansing ritual, which, as Josephus emphatically stresses, does not serve to remove sins. Josephus evidently wishes to reject a religious or cultic interpretation of John's message. Josephus himself reveals that he thereby takes the teeth out of the message of the Baptist when he speaks of the fact that John's activity caused great agitation. This would be difficult to imagine for the teaching of John sketched by Josephus.

Finally, Josephus offers another interpretation of the death of the Baptist: he is said to have been put to death by Herod (Antipas is meant) at the fortress Machaerus in southern Perea (which, as mentioned above, belonged together with Galilee to his dominion) because he feared the influence of John among the people. By contrast, according to the Gospel of Mark (Mark 6.14-29; cf. Matt 14.1-12), John was beheaded because he criticized the marriage of Antipas with Herodias, the earlier wife of his half-brother Philip.[32] The criticism is presumably directed against the fact that for this marriage Antipas had expelled his first wife, the daughter of the Nabataean king Aretas. This could also be the background for the defeat of Antipas mentioned by Josephus, which was inflicted upon him by this very Aretas as revenge for the expulsion of his daughter.

Even if the banquet scene in Mark 6.17-29 proves to be a legend, reworked with the motifs of comparable narratives,[33] it thus could

still have a historical core and be capable of being reconciled with the information in Josephus: John advocated a strict understanding of marriage oriented toward the Jewish law;[34] therefore he came into conflict with Antipas and was put to death by him in the milieu of the events of the Nabatean war.

What significance did John have for the activity of Jesus?

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# 7

# The Reign of God Begins

## *Jesus' Encounter with John*

All the Gospels put Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist before their reports about the public activity of Jesus. The baptism of John is also mentioned as the first event of the Jesus story in the speeches of Acts.[1] This is noteworthy because behind this phenomenon a historical constellation is recognizable that presented a difficulty for the authors of the Gospels, namely the fact that Jesus was baptized by John and initially belonged to John's circle of disciples. It is obvious that this stood in contradiction to the conviction of Jesus' status as Son of God, let alone to that of his Spirit-effected birth and the tradition that he was already with God before his coming into the world. If we bring into consideration the fact that the baptism of John was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1.4; Luke 3.3), then the problem becomes even sharper: was Jesus then also a sinner who wanted to be preserved from the wrath of God through the baptism of John? In the encounter with John the Baptist, historical reality and Christian faith strike hard against one another again—as they already did in the birth stories.

The difficulty can still be clearly recognized. The baptism of Jesus is portrayed not as entry into the fellowship of John's disciples but as the bestowal of the Spirit and "adoption" to Son of God (Mark 1.9-11). According to Matt 3.14, John even resists baptizing Jesus and

confesses that *he* must actually be baptized *by Jesus*. Here John, the preacher of repentance and baptizer and teacher of Jesus, has become a sinful human being who wants to be baptized by the Son of God![2] Finally, the Gospel of John no longer even recounts a baptism of Jesus, but only John's witness that he saw the Spirit come down and remain upon Jesus.[3]

John himself is interpreted with the help of Scripture citations as the forerunner of Jesus who prepares the way for him and refers his hearers to the Stronger One who comes after him.[4] The Elijah typology also belongs to this picture of the forerunner: the prophetic saying about the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord is now related to John as the forerunner of Jesus.[5]

In the Gospels, the portrayal of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus is thus determined by the conviction of Jesus' divine sonship and sinlessness.[6] If the birth stories turned out to be legends about the "divine child," then we are also dealing here with reports that narrate the historical event from the perspective of faith in Jesus as the Son of God. In contrast to the birth stories, however, the reports about John and Jesus are based on an important historical event: the encounter with John is the first historically certain event of the life of Jesus, an event that possesses fundamental significance for his own activity.

When this encounter took place does not become clear from the Gospels. Luke does provide a chronological placement for the activity of John: in Luke 3.1 he is said to have appeared in the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (14–37). This would be at some point between 26 and 30 CE; a more exact placement is not possible due to a number of uncertainties. Not much can be drawn from this for determining the date of Jesus' encounter with John, especially since Luke is concerned to place the events reported by him into a broader chronological connection and not with the details of the encounter of Jesus with John. It is historically conceivable that Jesus entered the Baptist's sphere of influence at a relatively early point in time. His conspicuous behavior could support this supposition: Jesus separated himself from his family[7] in an almost programmatic way and remained unmarried.[8] An early encounter with the Baptist and the influence of his lifestyle could stand behind this behavior.[9]

We also can only speculate about the reasons that moved Jesus to go out to John in the wilderness. This encounter is conspicuous in any case because John's position at the Jordan was some distance from Galilee. Thus, it could scarcely have been a chance encounter. Jesus must have heard of John and have felt attracted by his message.[10] The direct encounter must have not only convinced him to undergo the symbolic act of immersion in the Jordan but also have moved him to enter into the circle of John's disciples.[11] This point can scarcely be overestimated for the subsequent way of Jesus: the proclamation of the dawning reign of God, with which Jesus will subsequently appear, received substantial impulses from John; indeed one can even say that without the encounter with John it would not have obtained the form in which we encounter it in the Gospels. Therefore, Jesus' relationship to John plays a fundamental role for the understanding of his activity.

The thematic commonalities first point to this influence: Jesus also calls for repentance, which for both Jesus and John is constitutive for the future deliverance. For Jesus too the near judgment of God is the horizon of his proclamation, even though he adds to this the reign of God that is dawning in his activity as an important element. For Jesus too the message of repentance is addressed to all Israel, although he did not announce it in the wilderness to those who came out to him but in Galilee and the neighboring regions and in Jerusalem. For Jesus too the appeal to the election of Israel is not a possibility for escaping the judgment of God but only the entrance into the fellowship founded by him. The proclamation of Jesus thus presents an analogy to that of the Baptist.

The note in the Gospel of John about the parallel baptizing activity of John and Jesus (John 3.22-24; 4.1) is also noteworthy in this connection. It is true that it is usually assumed, due to the absence of a corresponding note in the Synoptics, that Jesus did not continue the baptizing activity of John. But the possibility that the Gospel of John has preserved a historically accurate recollection cannot be excluded.[12] This could also be supported by a further observation: in Luke 7.18/Matt 11.2 there is a report of a question that John addresses to Jesus via his disciples. While Matthew mentions that John was already in prison at this time, this could be an adjustment to the previously mentioned handing over of John (Matt 4.12; cf. Mark 1.14; Luke 3.20).

Another recollection of a parallel activity of John and Jesus could then stand behind this tradition, which certainly comes from Q: both are active alongside one another; John inquires about the self-understanding of Jesus. It is undoubtedly accurate that in Jesus' proclamation the message of the reign of God takes the place of the baptism of John. This does not, however, speak against the possibility that Jesus also baptized initially and in this way gained his first followers. This would not only explain the correction in John 4.2, which evidently comes from a later redactor,[13] but also make comprehensible why baptism very quickly became a central symbolic act of Christians and could even be passed off as a commission from Jesus himself.[14] The fellowship of disciples that was called into life by Jesus during his independent activity was, however, not founded on baptism but on the call to discipleship.

Finally, there are a number of traces in the New Testament that still permit the significance of John for Jesus to be recognized. Here, special mention must be made of the passage about John and Jesus preserved in Q: John is referred to by Jesus as "more than a prophet," indeed as "the greatest among those born of women"; his residence in the wilderness is positively contrasted with those who are clothed in white garments and live in palaces.[15] The esteem for the radical wilderness preacher, supplemented with a dig against the rulers—one must certainly think of Antipas in the first instance—is tangible here. The sentence that follows is then interesting: the reign of God establishes a new order in which the smaller becomes greater (Q 7.28). This is presumably directed to Jesus and John: as the disciple of John, Jesus is the "smaller one" in relation to John. For the establishment of the reign of God, by contrast, he plays the more important role.[16]

On the basis of this passage, which is most informative for the historical evaluation, the relationship of Jesus to John can be captured well: Jesus always esteemed the Baptist very highly, and he also did not distance himself from John in the time of his independent activity; but in relation to the reign of God he judged his own role to be more important. Thus, the reason that Jesus stepped out of the role of a disciple of John resides in his self-understanding in relation to the establishment of the reign of God. What did his own mission look like in comparison with that of the Baptist?

# 8

# The Reign of God Begins

## *Beginnings in Galilee*

### Beyond the Wilderness

When Jesus comes to Galilee after his stay in the wilderness, this is not merely a matter of returning to his home.[1] Rather, the change of location has a programmatic meaning: Jesus needs to announce his own message, which expresses itself in an analogous manner to that of John, even in the outer form of his activity. This also includes the region in which this takes place. In the perspective of Jesus, Galilee was part of the promised land in the first instance. His activity was therefore directed to all Galilee. The Gospel of Mark accurately brings this to expression when it precedes the description of Jesus' activity with a summary that describes his coming to Galilee and the content of his message:

> Mark 1.14-15: After John was handed over, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God and saying: the time is fulfilled and the reign of God has come to you. Repent and believe in the gospel.

Thus, the coming to Galilee and the proclamation of the reign of God are the features that mark out the activity of Jesus. It will be necessary at a later point to inquire into how exactly we should understand the

statement of the now dawning reign of God.[2] At this point we can initially affirm that we are dealing with a central topic of Jesus' activity that he develops further in various ways through his ministry.

For Mark—and also analogously for Matthew and Luke—it is important beyond this that John and Jesus appear in succession, although the death of John is reported only at a later point (Mark 6.14-29). Here, the fate of John models that of Jesus by way of anticipation: he is "handed over" (Mark 1.14)—just as Jesus is later "handed over" by Judas (Mark 3.19; 14.10-11, 18, 21, 42, 44), the chief priests (15.1, 10), and Pilate (15.15). In addition, the message of Jesus is subsumed by Mark under the term "gospel." With this he takes up a primitive Christian term that is especially found in Paul, where it refers to the events around Jesus Christ. Jesus himself almost certainly did not use this term, which was used, for example, in the political sphere and referred there to messages from or about the emperor.[3] Mark, however, uses this term to characterize the message of Jesus himself as well as the reports about his activity and fate.[4]

The step from Jesus the disciple of John in the wilderness to proclaimer of the reign of God in Galilee and its surroundings is thus characteristic for the character of the message of Jesus. Here, however, there is no contrast between a "gloomy" message of judgment from John and a "bright" invitation to the reign of God by Jesus. Rather, the messages of John and Jesus are closely related thematically. Like John, Jesus also called for repentance and used formulations that are also handed down almost word for word for John.[5] In the same way, judgment and salvation are not coordinated in a different way with Jesus than with John. Rather, both place their proclamation in the horizon of the imminent judgment of God and offer a single possibility of escaping it: John offers the immersion in the Jordan, Jesus the connection to the fellowship that has been called into life by him and that is determined by the dawning reign of God. Therefore, it applies equally for John and Jesus that judgment and salvation are components of one and the same action of God, which will take place in the near future.[6]

Why did Jesus separate from John, appear with his own message in a different region, and gather his own circle of disciples around him? Reference is often made in this connection to a visionary experience

that stands behind Luke 10.18: "I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning."

According to a widely held view, the vision mentioned here is said to have mediated to Jesus the insight that the coming of God proclaimed by John and his victory over Satan was now accomplished. This is simultaneously said to be the beginning of the independent continuation of the message of the Baptist by Jesus.[7] It fits this view that the word is formulated as an answer to the disciples sent out by Jesus, who reported to him after their return that even the demons obeyed them in his name. Through this a close connection arises between the saying about the fall of Satan and Jesus' driving out of demons.[8] The fall of Satan is already accomplished in the divine plan of history—this is the content of the vision of Jesus. From now on, his activity and that of his disciples also implement this event on earth. Therefore, the driving out of demons has fundamental significance for Jesus' understanding of his activity. We will encounter this point again in the next section of this chapter.[9]

It is thus completely conceivable that the separation of Jesus from John and the beginning of Jesus' own public activity is based on a vision and that we are thus dealing with an authentic saying of Jesus in Luke 10.18.[10] The report about the temptation of Jesus can also be associated with this vision.[11] This narrative, which is handed down in a shorter version in Mark 1.12-13 and in a longer version in Q (Matt 4.1-11/Luke 4.1-13), depicts an encounter of Jesus with Satan in the wilderness. Here, Satan attempts to gain power over Jesus with various offers. Jesus, however, withstands him, so that Satan finally leaves him. In the Gospel of Mark, the motif of eschatological peace between humans and animals from Isa 11.6-8 is taken up; in Q Jesus withstands the temptation of Satan as the model righteous person.

Whether this is based on a concrete experience of Jesus or whether we are dealing with a mythical narrative about the confrontation of Jesus with Satan that is anchored in the oldest Jesus tradition can scarcely be determined any longer. In contrast to Luke 10.18, there is no mention of the fall, that is, the disempowerment, of Satan. It is comparable, however, in that the activity of Jesus is portrayed in both texts as an activity that stands in opposition to the power of Satan.

Jesus' conviction that the power of Satan was already broken in heaven did not push into the background his encounter with the

Baptist, which was fundamental for his activity. Rather, his activity presents a further development of the message of the Baptist, though within a different horizon. This is already shown by the fact that there is not the slightest support in the Jesus tradition for the view that Jesus regarded his own activity as standing in contrast to that of John. Rather, it is clearly recognizable that he viewed John as a decisive figure in God's plan of salvation. Thus, the activity of Jesus must be understood as a continuation of that of the Baptist. In the process, however, Jesus set his own accents, which are grounded in his self-understanding as the representative of God and his reign. This may be illustrated with the help of three aspects.

(1) John advocated the model of a renewal through separation; Jesus, by contrast, stressed a claim on the promised land with the announcement of his message in the Jewish regions. Thus, the announcement that God is now establishing his reign simultaneously means for him a restitution of Israel within the borders of the twelve tribes. This hope, which had received a powerful boost since the aforementioned conquests of the Maccabees, also explains why the activity of Jesus effectively extended to the entire north of the region that formerly belonged to Israel and why he subsequently went to Jerusalem.[12] It finds expression not least in the establishment of the circle of the twelve, which symbolizes the completeness of Israel.[13]

(2) John appears in the wilderness as the symbolically charged location of the renewal of Israel at which the people must come out to him. The activity of Jesus extends, by contrast, to *various* regions. This also has symbolic meaning: even the itinerant existence of Jesus becomes a thematic feature of his message.[14] The saying from Luke (Q) 9.58, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head," which belongs to the oldest level of the Jesus tradition, makes this clear. It describes Jesus as someone who—unlike even the animals—has no homestead. This is not to be traced back to poverty or a low social status of Jesus but to a lifestyle that belonged to his message: his activity is not carried out in a special place but is characterized by the offensive

[i.e., non-defensive] establishment of the reign of God in the regions that belonged to the Israel of the twelve tribes according to its ideal conception. Thus, both places of activity—the wilderness and the regions that belonged to the ideal Israel—have symbolic meaning. They point, each in its own way, to the renewal of Israel as the goal of the activity of John and Jesus.

(3) In Luke 7.31-34 (Q) John and Jesus are together contrasted with the rejecting Israel, but distinguished from each other: John did not eat and drank no wine and was rejected with the argument that he had a demon. Jesus, by contrast, ate and drank, but he was likewise rejected, now with the verdict that he was a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Thus, the activity of both was suspect, even if for different reasons: John appeared as an ascetic preacher of repentance, which evidently could be interpreted as possession; the open meals of Jesus were viewed, by contrast, as unseemly revelry. The difference between the two is described in a similar manner in Mark 2.18-22: the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees fast, whereas the disciples of Jesus do not. Thus, the activity of Jesus was evidently already markedly different outwardly from that of the Baptist. What were their essential contents?

## God or Satan?

The first public appearance of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark already unmistakably places before one's eyes the provocation bound up with his activity. With his appearance in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1.21-28), Jesus triggers consternation among those present, for he teaches "in authority" and thus not at all like the scribes that one knows. But Mark does not narrate *what* Jesus taught. Rather, the example of his singular authority is provided by the following exorcism of an unclean spirit. It shows Jesus as the "Holy One of God," who declares battle with the demons. The astonishing things that are reported about Jesus also repeatedly lead to the question of his identity later: one regards him as the resurrected Baptist, as Elijah, or as one

of the prophets (Mark 6.14-16; 8.28-29). The riddle of his true nature cannot, however, be solved by these attempts at explanation. They show, however, that Jesus appeared with an authority that was irritating and that provoked one to take a position in relation to him—either affirming or rejecting.

The provocation of his activity comes most clearly to expression in the Beelzebul controversy. This episode occurs in Mark 3.22-30 as well as in Luke 11.14-23 and Matt 12.22-30. It can be traced back to two versions: the one in Mark and the other in Q. We are dealing, then, with a very old tradition that already existed prior to Mark and Q. In Mark and Q it was interpreted in respectively particular but thoroughly similar ways (this will be discussed in greater detail below). The fundamental significance of this episode resides in the fact that it sums up in a focal point the claim of Jesus and the provocation that resides therein.

The core of the tradition says that the opponents of Jesus—in Mark it is the scribes from Jerusalem; in Luke (and presumably already in Q) it is unspecified people from the circle of Jesus; in Matthew it is Pharisees—confront him with the accusation that he acts in the name of Beelzebul, the chief ruler of the demons. Jesus initially reacts by taking this accusation *ad absurdum*: if the opponents were right, then Satan would rise up against himself and voluntarily destroy his reign. But why should he do such a thing? An important presupposition stands behind this response, without which the argument would not be convincing: that Jesus' exorcisms mean precisely a *weakening* of Satan and his reign that ultimately leads to his destruction. The one who disputes this has not understood the nature of the activity of Jesus and the power from which it is fed and has placed himself on the wrong side in the process of the establishment of the reign of God.

That we are dealing with a confrontation that is fundamental for understanding the activity of Jesus is also shown by the traditions with which the controversy is interpreted in Mark and Q:

> Mark 3.28-29: Amen I say to you: all sins and all blasphemies will be forgiven human beings. But the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not obtain forgiveness unto eternity but he is guilty of an eternal sin.

The one who attributes Jesus' exorcisms to Satan thus makes himself guilty of a sin for which there is no forgiveness, for he has sinned against the Spirit of God himself. From the perspective of the Gospel of Mark it cannot therefore be in doubt that Jesus rightly lays claim to act in the name of God: Mark had already reported that the Spirit of God was bestowed upon Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1.9-11) and that Satan had left him. By contrast, the opponents of Jesus who bring him into connection with Beelzebul trace back his power to, of all things, the God-opposed power of Satan. With this they commit an unforgivable sin and call judgment upon themselves.

In Q 11.19-20 the Beelzebul controversy is interpreted in a somewhat different manner:

> 11.19: If I drive out the demons by Beelzebul—by whom do your sons drive them out then? Therefore, they will be your judges.
>
> 11.20: But if I drive out the demons by the finger [Matt: Spirit] of God, then the reign of God has arrived among you.

Here too we are dealing with the interpretation of Jesus' exorcisms. That Jesus drives out demons at all does not yet say anything about the significance of his activity, for others could also do this—as verse 19 shows. That his exorcisms would mean a connection with Beelzebul is first shown to be absurd, for this would apply in the same way to the sons of those who make such an accusation—which they would not seriously assert. Beyond this there is a decisive feature of the exorcisms of Jesus: because his activity is based on a direct connection with God, his exorcisms—and only his!—mean the dawning of the reign of God. Verse 20 brings this to expression with the reference to the "finger of God."[15] The accusation of his opponents is thus turned on its head: Jesus is not in an alliance with Beelzebul, the hostile power that stands behind the demons. Instead, his exorcisms mean exactly the opposite: the battle is announced to Satan; human beings liberated from the demons are snatched from his reign and placed under the reign of God.

Thus, in the two parallel constructed sentences, the two possible sources of the authority of Jesus—Beelzebul and God—are juxtaposed with each other. This shows again that the activity of Jesus was

perceived to be extraordinary and was also understood to be so by Jesus himself. This leads to the all-important question, namely, who has power: God or Satan? With this an initial feature of the activity of Jesus is grasped that makes concrete the aforementioned assessment of his own role in relation to the reign of God: his activity means—according to his own conviction and that of his followers—the establishment of the reign of God. An important dimension in which this is recognizable is his ability to liberate human beings from demons or unclean spirits that torment them. The extraordinary nature of his activity—this also could not be denied by his opponents—does not allow for neutrality: his opponents do not simply dispute his authority but trace it back to Satan, for which reason Jesus, in turn, announces their condemnation in the judgment. The alternative is thus laid on the table in unsurpassable clarity: either one accepts the claim of Jesus or one disputes that he acts in the authority of God and sees him to be in alliance with Satan. Neutrality would not be an option—the opponents of Jesus also understood this.

What took place in the exorcisms and healings of Jesus? In the relevant reports magical practices are sometimes mentioned that Jesus is supposed to have used in the healing of sick or possessed people.

Thus, for example, in Mark 7.31-37 there is a report of a man who was deaf and could not speak clearly: Jesus places his fingers in his ears, touches his tongue with spittle, and then effects his healing through a prayer. These episodes are not found in Matthew and Luke—possibly because of their offensiveness. Likewise, it is only in Mark that we find the narrative of the healing of a blind man that Jesus performs by spitting in his eyes and placing his hands on him, as a result of which the blind man first sees unclearly and then, after another laying on of the hands, sees everything clearly and sharply (Mark 8.22-26). John reports about the healing of a man born blind, which Jesus performs by making a paste from his spittle and spreading this on his eyes (John 9.1-12).

One also encounters a magical conception in the narrative of the woman with a blood flow in Mark 5.25-34: a woman who has suffered from a blood flow for twelve years pushes herself out of the crowd to Jesus, touches his garment, and is healed. It also belongs to the magical conception that Jesus feels that a power has gone out from him and inquires who touched him.

How the exorcisms and healings of Jesus concretely took place can no longer be clearly reconstructed. That he used magical healing methods is entirely conceivable and may not be judged with the standard of a present-day interpretation of reality—especially as "magical" activity in antiquity by no means involved a negative qualification per se. What is decisive is whether in the world that must be presupposed for Jesus the liberation of a human being from a demon that was tormenting him or the healing of sicknesses through spittle, the laying on of hands, or incantations belonged to the sphere of reality that was experienced or regarded as capable of being experienced. This is, in fact, the case, as a number of texts from the Jewish and pagan environment of the New Testament show. I will mention one example from the Jewish sphere and one example from the Roman sphere.

(1) Josephus reports that King Solomon already had mastered the art of healing sicknesses through sayings and of driving out evil spirits through incantations. This is also said to have been very much in force among the Jewish people at his own time, as Josephus demonstrates with the depiction of an exorcism that a certain Eleazar performed:

> And this same form of healing remains quite strong among us until today. For I became acquainted with a certain Eleazar of my own people, who, in the presence of Vespasian and his sons, along with their tribunes and a crowd of soldiers, delivered those possessed by demons. The method of healing is as follows: Bringing up to the nose of the demonized person a ring that had under its seal a root from among those prescribed by Solomon, he [Eleazar] would then draw out the demonic [presence] through the nostrils, as the man sniffed. Upon the man's immediately falling down, he adjured the demonic [presence] not to return to him again, making mention of Solomon and likewise reciting the incantations he had composed. Eleazar, wishing to persuade and convince those present that he had this power, first placed a cup or foot-basin filled with water a short distance away and ordered the demonic [presence], which was now outside the person, to knock these over, and so cause the spectators to realize that it had left the person. When this happened, the sagacity and wisdom of Solomon became evident through this. We felt bound to speak of these matters so that all might know the greatness of his nature and his closeness to God, and so that the king's preeminence in every sort of virtue should not [be] hidden from any of those beneath the sun. (*Ant.* 8.46–49, translated by Begg/Spilsbury 2005)

(2) A healing miracle by Vespasian is reported by both the Roman historian Tacitus and the biographer Suetonius. The shorter version is found in Suetonius:

> Because he was, so to speak, an unexpected and still new emperor, he was lacking in authority and a certain majesty. This too he acquired. A certain man from the ordinary people who had lost his sight and likewise another with a crippled leg approached him together while he was sitting in front of the tribunal, begging him for the help for their infirmity that had been shown to them in a dream by Serapis. He would, they had been told, make the eyes better if he spat on them and would heal the leg if he deigned to touch it with his heel. He could hardly believe that the business would in any way be successful and for that reason he did not even dare to attempt it. But finally, when his friends were openly urging him on in front of the crowd, he attempted both; and the outcome did not let him down. (*Vespasian* 7, translated by Jones/Milns 2003)

The examples could easily be multiplied. They show that healings and exorcisms were not unimaginable or unique in Jesus' cultural environment—though they also were not simply something commonplace. They were astonishing deeds of extraordinary people that were attributed to their special abilities.[16] Therefore, it is highly probable that they also formed an important component of the activity of Jesus. This is supported not least by the fact that they are found not only in individual narratives but also in summary descriptions of his activity—for example in Mark 1.32-34; 3.7-12; 6.53-56; Acts 2.22; 10.38—and Josephus, in his previously mentioned report about Jesus ("Non-Christian Sources" in ch. 3), also mentions "incredible deeds" that Jesus performed even before he mentions Jesus' teaching. In their meaning for the understanding of Jesus' activity these deeds were not, of course, unequivocal, as the Beelzebul controversy especially shows, but were open to different interpretations. They could be traced back to an alliance with Satan or alternatively to the activity of God in Jesus. In the latter case they were often embellished through popular motifs in order to underline their significance in this way.

The followers of Jesus did not conceal the rejection of Jesus' deeds of power as proof of his divine authority, but rather they also handed down the position of his (and thus their own) opponents. But they

especially made use of the two other possibilities. They embellished the powerful deeds of Jesus and in this way surrounded his activity with a divine aura. For this purpose, in the post-Easter period they also augmented the pre-Easter traditions with narratives that cannot be traced back to the time of the historical Jesus. These include, for example, the narrative of Jesus' walking on water, the narrative of the discovery of a coin in the mouth of a fish (Matt 17.24-27), and the narrative of the transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2.1-11). In such narratives legendary and to some extent fairy-tale-like motifs are reworked that are transferred to Jesus in order to emphasize his divine authority.

Taking up Jesus' self-understanding as the representative of the reign of God, as this is found in the aforementioned passage Q 11.19-20, his activity was thereby interpreted as the fulfillment of prophetic promises about the activity of God at the end of time. Here, mention should first be made of Jesus' answer to John, which is handed down in Q 7.22-23, in response to the question of whether he is the expected coming one:

> Go and announce to John what you have seen and heard: blind people see again, lame people walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf people hear, dead people are raised, and poor people have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.

This description of the activity of Jesus is inspired by many passages of Scripture: Isa 61.1 (proclamation of the gospel to the poor, blind people seeing), Isa 29.18-19 (deaf people hearing, blind people seeing), Isa 35.5-6 (bind people, deaf people, lame people), Isa 42.18 (deaf people hear, blind people see). That the expectations that are formulated here remained alive in Judaism is shown by a fragment from Qumran:

> [for] he will heal the badly wounded and will make the dead live, he will proclaim good news to the poor and [. . .] . . . [. . .] he will lead the [. . .] . . . and enrich the hungry.[17]

The activity of Jesus is interpreted with reference to prophetic promises in a similar way in Mark 7.37. At the end of the narrative about

the healing of the man who could not hear and could speak only with difficulty, the bystanders say, "He has done all things well. He has made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." Here, there is a backward look, in a kind of summary, to the previously reported activity of Jesus, which is interpreted with an expression that recalls prophetic language. In this context belongs also, for example, the raising of the dead young man from Nain (Luke 7.11-17), which is configured according to the model of the narrative of the raising of the son of the widow of Zarephath by Elijah (1 Kgs 17.17-24).

Thus, Jesus must have appeared as a charismatic person with extraordinary abilities. His activity included deeds that produced amazement and dismay. It is possible that this led him to the conviction that the significance of his activity reached beyond that of John. It is clear at any rate that he understood his activity as the establishment of the reign of God and therefore declared blessed the eyewitnesses of this event.

> Blessed are the eyes that see what you see and the ears that hear what you hear. For many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and to hear what you hear and could not. (Q 10.23-24)

Thus, to be an eyewitness of the activity of Jesus was something special, for one directly experienced the establishment of the reign of God on earth; indeed, one could even directly participate in it—by entering into the community founded by Jesus.

## The Community of the Children of God

### Homelessness, discipleship, and the circle of the twelve

Let us now address the Beelzebul controversy, which was discussed in the last section in somewhat greater detail. We have already seen that it places one before the fundamental alternative "God or Satan." This can be clarified with the help of its embedding in the immediate context. In Mark this episode is framed by the rejection of Jesus by his biological family and the establishment of a new community that

replaces it as the new "family."[18] At first the family of Jesus makes the accusation that he is "out of his mind" (3.21). After the rejection of the Beelzebul accusation described above, his biological family as those who are—actually and symbolically—"standing outside" is distinguished from the "true family" of Jesus. This is composed of those who do the will of God (Mark 3.31-35; *Gos. Thom.* 99). From this another important feature of his activity can be extracted: the provocation bound up with the activity of Jesus led to a polarization between rejecters and sympathizers and with this to a polarization within the communities of the places in which Jesus appeared. This can be described from the starting point of the programmatic scene in his hometown, Nazareth.

The narrative exists in two variants: In Mark 6.1-6a/Matt 13.53-58 Jesus, with his teaching and his deeds of power, causes offense among the inhabitants of Nazareth who know him and his family as normal inhabitants of the village. Jesus encounters this with the saying that a prophet is without honor only in his hometown. Luke has formed from this a programmatic scene that inaugurates the activity of Jesus: in Luke 4.16-30 Jesus relates the prophecy from Isa 61.1 to himself in the sermon in Nazareth and then with a prophetic saying of his own points to the rejection that he will experience in his hometown. In this context we encounter a different version of the saying about the prophet in his hometown than in Mark and Matthew. Jesus then juxtaposes this with the example of Elijah and Elisha, who in situations of hardship (famine, leprosy) were sent not to Israel but precisely to non-Israelites. The episode thereby points ahead beyond the immediate occasion to the effects bound up with the activity of Jesus: Nazareth, which stands representatively for Israel here, will reject Jesus, whereas the Gentiles will accept the salvation. This is precisely what takes place within the (hi)story narrated in the Gospel of Luke and Acts and is explained by Paul at the end of Acts, that is, at the end of the work of history composed by Luke, with the word of hardening from Isa 6.9-10 (Acts 28.28).

The saying about the prophet who is not acknowledged in his hometown is found outside of this episode in John 4.44 as well as in *Gos. Thom.* 31, which also has a Greek parallel on POxy 1. The following versions of this saying thus exist:

| Mark 6.4 | Matt 13.57 | Luke 4.24 | John 4.44 | *Gos. Thom.* 31 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his house. | A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his house. | No prophet is welcome in his hometown. | A prophet has no honor in his hometown. | A prophet is not welcome in his hometown and a physician performs no healings on those who know him. |

The findings of the tradition can be explained as follows: primitive Christianity knew about the rejection that Jesus experienced in his hometown. This was explained with the help of a proverbial saying that was also applied to Greek itinerant philosophers and is found here in the mouth of Jesus.[19] The episode handed down in Mark and Matthew relates the rejection to Nazareth and thereby makes use of information about his personal environment (occupation, name of his mother and brothers, mention of his sisters). Luke expands this to a fundamental matter and relates the narrative to the rejection of Jesus by Israel as a whole, which has its basis in his openness in relation to the Gentiles. The Gospel of John also knows the tradition of the rejection of Jesus in his hometown, but relates it to Galilee and also grounds it with a version of the aforementioned proverbial saying. The acceptance refused to Jesus is subtly developed thereby: the Galileans initially willingly receive Jesus (4.45), identify him with the help of his signs as the prophet (6.14), but fail to recognize his true nature as the Son sent from God (6.42). Finally, the *Gospel of Thomas* is no longer interested in a concrete historical situation but hands down the isolated proverbial saying in an expanded form.[20] Here there is reflection on the non-understanding of the words of Jesus precisely among those who know him. They will therefore not share in the "healings" bound up with these words—which in the *Gospel of Thomas* means concretely: the redemption mediated by the understanding of the words.

The episode allows one to recognize a conflict that was connected to the activity of Jesus from the beginning, was ignited by the nature of his activity, and soon expanded into a fundamental issue, as Luke, John, and the *Gospel of Thomas* show in their own respective ways. The irritations concerning the authority of Jesus were so great precisely

because one knew of his origin from an ordinary family that resided in a small Galilean village.

In the Nazareth episode it therefore becomes recognizable that Jesus, although he came from Nazareth, was no longer at home there after his return from John. Rather, his activity henceforth extended to the whole of Galilee and even reached beyond it. This itinerant existence without a fixed place of residence and without family was a characteristic feature of his activity. It was strange and provocative in a special way for the people from his social environment, namely an ancient agrarian milieu. This was reinforced in addition by the fact that Jesus also called others to share this way of life with him, even if they had already established their own families. I will need to return to this point.

Therefore, the frequently encountered hypothesis that Capernaum became the center of his activity after his departure from Nazareth may not be understood to mean that Jesus sought out a new place of residence.[21] It is correct that Capernaum is the place to which Jesus frequently returns according to the Gospel of Mark and in which Simon Peter, the leading head of the circle of the twelve, lived. It is also correct that Matthew especially has Jesus make a proper change of location from Nazareth to Capernaum (Matt 4.13). But with this there is already a looking ahead to the Gentile mission beginning with Jesus: Matthew wants to relate this passage to Isa 8.23, which mentions "Galilee of the Gentiles," and he therefore somewhat awkwardly combines this with the change of location from Nazareth to Capernaum.[22] If one observes in addition that according to Luke the activity of Jesus began in Nazareth and according to John in Cana and that Capernaum, together with the Galilean villages Chorazin and Bethsaida, is even the addressee of words of judgment from Jesus,[23] then the supposed special role of Capernaum is further relativized. Perhaps this is due in the first instance to the fact that Peter played a major role in the post-Easter period, and therefore episodes from his place of residence obtained a prominent place within the synoptic tradition. Therefore, it is no accident that the Gospel of John, where this role is not assigned to Peter in the same way, has much less of an orientation to Capernaum.[24]

This activity of Jesus that was directed to a region and not bound to a fixed place corresponds to the establishment of a community of

followers. According to the Gospels, this takes place by Jesus calling people to abandon their occupational and private situations without delay and join his fellowship.

Thus the activity of Jesus begins, according to the Gospel of Mark, with the calling of the two pairs of brothers Simon and Andrew and James and John (Mark 1.16-20). Here, the calling of Elisha by Elijah in 1 Kgs 19.19-21 stands in the background literarily. There, Elijah throws his mantle over Elisha as a sign of the calling to be a prophet, as a result of which Elisha leaves his oxen, says goodbye to his parents, and follows Elijah. We are not, however, dealing with only an "ideal scene" configured according to this model. On the one hand, there is a description of what discipleship means: in exact correspondence to each other, it says in the first case "and they left the nets and followed him," and in the second, "and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the day laborers and went after him." Moreover, the double calling of Jesus is characteristic: in the first case this takes place in direct speech, and in the second it is taken up through "and he called them." On the other hand, there is mention of the names and occupations (fishermen) of the ones who are called, and in the case of the second pair of brothers the father (Zebedee) and his day laborers are referenced. The small scene thus shows that for those who were directly called by him following Jesus meant giving up their previous life relations. But the scene also has a historical-biographical interest. "Following after" is to be taken literally here: those who are called actually go behind Jesus. That this had to be replaced by other forms of "following after" when Jesus was no longer there is clear to Mark. The model for this is the way of the Son of Man Jesus, which also leads through suffering and death. Thus, the following after in suffering is placed before the eyes of his readers, who live in a situation of disturbance and temptation (*Anfechtung*) as a way that corresponds to the fate of Jesus (Mark 8.31–9.1).

Additional call narratives are found in Mark 2.14, in Luke (Q) 9.57-62/Matt 8.18-22, and in John 1.35-51. In the synoptic tradition both those summoned to discipleship and those who turn to Jesus on their own initiative and want to enter into discipleship are directed in a blunt manner to the conditions to which they commit themselves: entrance into the Jesus fellowship means sharing in Jesus' placeless manner of existence ("the Son of Man has no place to lay his head");

the one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for participation in the reign of God;[25] even piety toward one's dead is prohibited ("Let the dead bury their dead"). This last saying, which due to its radical character very likely originates from Jesus himself, expresses the claim on the followers with provoking sharpness. Burying the dead belongs to the unwritten rules of human culture, not only in Judaism but also in the ancient world more generally. Jesus not only violates this rule as such but even does so in one of the most personal spheres, namely in relation to one's own father. In view of this it is not surprising that his contemporaries not only marveled at this behavior but also were angered by it.

The direct summons of Jesus to join him, which tolerated no delay, is thus an important presupposition for the emergence of the fellowship of followers. But discipleship also arose as a result of the fact that people decided on their own initiative to enter into the fellowship of Jesus. This is already indicated in the aforementioned discipleship dialogues in Q and then emerges more clearly in the Gospel of John especially. The first ones who become followers here are two disciples of John who attach themselves to Jesus. One of these is Andrew, who then also brings his brother Simon (Peter) to Jesus (John 1.35-44). The so-called "beloved disciple" may be hidden behind the second disciple. It is true that the Gospel of John also knows of the calling by Jesus (John 1.43), but with the emphasis on the self-initiative it differs from the synoptic accentuation. Historically one will judge that both, the authoritative call of Jesus and the voluntary decision to follow, led to the emergence of the community of Jesus. The Synoptics and John each in their own way work out one of these aspects in particular. It is common to both that discipleship means joining the itinerant existence of Jesus and sharing his situation of being without place and family.

The community of followers included a circle of men and women whose size cannot be determined exactly and also need not have remained constant. This fellowship formed the core of the Israel that must be renewed by already practicing the order of the reign of God in advance. We will need to return to this point in the treatment of the ethos of Jesus.[26]

The meaning of the fellowship of Jesus is expressed most clearly in the establishment of the circle of the twelve. That Jesus called such

a circle into life is attested by old, historically reliable reports.[27] Both Paul (1 Cor 15.5) and John (6.67, 70-71; 20.24) mention the twelve without reporting about the emergence of a corresponding circle or mentioning the names that belong to it. The symbolism of the circle was destroyed through the handing over of Jesus by Judas and his subsequent suicide.[28] When it was still held fast to in the post-Easter period, then this was because one saw an important aspect of the activity of Jesus here. Conversely, if the tradition of the circle of the twelve emerged only after Easter, then it would be completely unthinkable that one would have counted Judas within that number, who does, however, turn up in all the Synoptic Gospels in the list of the twelve and who can also be called "one of the twelve" outside of these lists.[29] Finally, if the circle of the twelve was introduced as a leadership body of the post-Easter community, then one would expect it to exist for at least a certain amount of time and to have an influence. By contrast, relatively soon—namely already in the 40s CE—it appears to have no longer played a role as a leadership authority. In this period a member, James the son of Zebedee, was put to death (cf. Acts 12.12), and with James, the brother of Jesus, a different person became the head of the community in Jerusalem. The short duration of the existence of the circle is thus a further argument for maintaining that we are dealing with a symbolic institution that emerged from the activity of Jesus and was then quickly replaced by other organizational forms.

In the synoptic tradition we find slightly varying lists of names for the members of the circle of the twelve.[30] The most conspicuous deviation is that Luke lists a Judas, son of James, in place of the person called Thaddeus in Mark and Matthew. This could indicate that the composition of the twelve was already not constant during the activity of Jesus. The symbolic meaning of the circle would be increased through this, since in this case Jesus himself would already have carried out a completion of the circle after the departure of a member—a similar process to the replacement of Judas by Matthias reported in Acts 1.15-26. The four disciples who always stand at the head of the lists are Simon Peter (always named as the first), Andrew, John, and James. Judas always stands at the end, and in Acts 1.13 he is completely absent. The lists thus already point to a ranking that reflects the circumstances in the post-Easter community. The saying from Matt 16.17-19, which almost certainly does not go back to Jesus, also

points to this phenomenon. In this saying Simon is declared to be the "rock" (Greek *petra* = the rock) on which Jesus will build his church. The author of the Gospel of Matthew has used the scene of Peter's confession from Mark 8.27-30 to ground the authority of Simon with a saying placed in the mouth of Jesus. The special position of Simon Peter also becomes clear in the tradition quoted by Paul in 1 Cor 15.3-5: there Paul reports appearances of the Risen One and names first the appearance before Cephas (Aramaic *kefa* = the rock), and then the appearance before the twelve. Paul thus knows of the institution of the circle of the twelve and knows about the special role of Simon/Cephas/Peter. Finally, this also comes to expression in Acts where Peter, as he is almost always called here, is the leading figure of the primitive church in Jerusalem.[31] Luke emphasized the institution of the twelve in a particular manner: it is the leadership authority of the primitive church of Jerusalem in the first years after Jesus' ascension and therefore must be completed by a person from the immediate circle of the eyewitnesses after the death of Judas.[32] Thus, the establishment of this circle—in Mark it is literally said "he made the twelve" (Mark 3.14)—is a symbolic action of Jesus: the twelve stand for the twelve tribes and with this for all Israel, to which Jesus lays claim with his activity. We already encountered this claim when we considered the regions where Jesus appeared. With regard to the circle of the twelve it comes to expression with particular conciseness in the saying from the Q tradition: "You will sit on the (twelve) thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel" (Q 22.30).

The circle of the twelve is promised here a function in the eschatological judgment. With this it is brought directly into the dawning of the reign of God effected by Jesus. It is noteworthy that Jesus himself does not belong to this number but stands over his disciples.[33] Thus, he was distinguished from the circle of the twelve as the one who stands between God and the ones whom he himself commissioned: "The one who listens to you listens to me and the one who rejects you rejects me. But the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Q 10.16).

There is then a direct representation of God through Jesus that can then pass over to the messengers. Jesus understood himself to be God's representative, whose exorcisms meant the establishment of the reign of God. In addition, he could, in turn, commission people to

represent him, to collaborate in the establishment of the reign of God, and to share in the authority given to him in a derived manner.

The circle of the twelve is thus a symbolic entity within the fellowship of disciples established by Jesus. It makes clear that the activity of Jesus stands in the tradition of Israelite-Jewish expectations of the reestablishment of Israel, which is now being realized. Therefore, features of discipleship are also illustrated with the help of the twelve. Sharing in the homeless itinerant existence represents here the presupposition of participation in the establishment of the reign of God, which is described more concretely in the so-called mission discourse.

The discourse is found in Mark (6.7-13), in Matthew (10.1-16), and twice in Luke (9.1-6; 10.1-16). Matthew and Luke possess a number of common elements that Mark does not show, such as the saying about the sending out of the disciples as sheep among wolves, the prohibition of shoes and staff, the exhortation to give a greeting of peace in the houses that are visited, the proverbial saying about the worker who is worthy of his wages, and the threatening saying about the cities that reject the disciples. The pronouncement of woes over the Galilean places (Luke 10.12-15/Matt 11.21-24) could also have been originally bound up with a version of the mission discourse used by Matthew and Luke.

This first shows that the discourse stood both in Mark and in Q and thus belongs to the oldest part of the Jesus tradition. In Luke the commission to mission by Jesus goes beyond the circle of the twelve, for seventy (-two) disciples are sent out the second time. The work for the reign of God is here an assignment for the disciples of Jesus altogether and not only for the circle of the twelve. With this Luke probably accurately grasped that the calling of the disciple group, which was not restricted to the circle of the twelve, was tied to participation in the activity of Jesus. The sending out of the twelve is thus an exemplary description of the existence of disciples. Thus, with the sending out it is certainly not a matter of an action that is carried out once or twice. Rather, this portrayal expresses a characteristic aspect of the activity of Jesus in the form of programmatic scenes. This holds fast to the recollection that Jesus summoned his disciples to participate in the establishment of the reign of God. His followers' conviction that they were also to appear in his name after his death and continue

his activity is based on this summons. Thus, the primitive Christian mission has its historical starting point here, in the commission to participate in the reign of God.

A certain manner of activity is bound up with this mission: those who are sent should forgo every form of travel equipment; they are to have with them no money or provisions, no sandals, no staff for defense, and no second garment. Thus, the disciples of Jesus are characterized by a programmatic needlessness. If they actually appeared in the manner that is described in the mission discourses, then to their contemporaries they must have appeared similar to the Essenes or Cynic philosophers, who also traveled through the land as itinerants without needs, though the latter scarcely came into Galilean villages. With the messengers of Jesus this has, of course, a distinct motivation: they are commissioned to deliver the proclamation of Jesus concerning the dawning reign of God and to continue his healing activity. The form of their activity is the exterior expression of their message: the forgoing of equipment for one's own provision and defense directs one's view to the order of the reign of God, which is realized symbolically in the activity of the messengers of Jesus.

Jesus thus expects from his followers that they commit themselves to his message without compromise and symbolically exemplify the order of the reign of God to their contemporaries. He challenges them to consider first whether they feel prepared for this task:

> If someone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters but also his own life, then he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his cross and follow after me cannot be my disciple.
>
> For who among you, wishing to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the costs, whether he has what is necessary to carry it out, lest when he has laid the foundation and cannot complete it, all who see him begin to mock him and say: this person began to build and could not complete it. Or which king, who goes to war against another king, does not sit down beforehand and consider whether he is in position with ten thousand to meet the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? Otherwise, while he is still far off he sends an embassy and asks for peace. So therefore none of you who does not forsake everything that he has can be my disciple. (Luke 14.26-33)

The conditions of discipleship are specified here with all due clarity: it is a matter of radical leave-taking from previous ties—indeed even hating one's family members is required! This is not to be understood as an exhortation to actual hate toward one's own family. Rather, "hate" is here a hyperbolically intensified formulation that demands absolute readiness to subordinate the most personal relationships to the discipleship of Jesus. The concern is thus with priorities: in light of the reign of God that is now dawning, everything else becomes unimportant. As it states at the end of the text, the one who will not accept this consequence cannot be a disciple of Jesus. The analogies in Mark 8.34-35 and John 16.25 show that we are dealing again with a very old tradition. The parables of building a tower and going to war emphasize that it requires a well-considered decision to commit oneself to such an existence.

The reign of God does not tolerate any half-heartedness. Jesus does not bring peace but the sword: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have not come to bring peace but the sword" (Matt 10.34; cf. Luke 12.51).

The message of Jesus could drive a wedge between the closest family members—between son and father, mother and daughter, stepdaughter and stepmother. It is highly probable that this almost-martial image comes from Jesus himself. This is already supported by its drastic character, which makes it improbable that such a saying was first ascribed to Jesus after the fact. It brings the radical nature of his claim to expression with unsurpassable clarity: like a sword, the demand of Jesus makes a separation between those who open themselves to it and those who hesitate or even reject it. Following Jesus could tear apart families, since there is nothing to gloss over.

Following Jesus can ultimately mean even sharing in his way of suffering. The language of bearing one's cross in Luke 14.27 (cited above) as well as in Mark 8.35 and *Gos. Thom.* 55 includes in the fellowship with Jesus even the possibility that one may die. This may already be formulated from a later perspective, when one knew about the manner of Jesus' death. But we could also be dealing with a drastic manner of speaking of the conditions of discipleship that does not yet have Jesus' death on a cross in view. This could be supported by the fact that there is an exhortation to take up one's own cross and not that of Jesus.

Through the calling of disciples Jesus thus called into life a fellowship that was to work together with him on the establishment of the reign of God. The circle of the twelve as the core of this fellowship was simultaneously a symbolic representation of all Israel and with this a demonstration of the intention of the activity of Jesus as the eschatological gathering of Israel. This is illustrated through the image of the harvest with which Jesus sent out his disciples to the Israel mission according to Matthew and Luke: "The harvest is great but the workers are few. Therefore, ask the lord of the harvest that he send workers into his harvest" (Q 10.2).

As this saying shows, Jesus saw himself faced with the great task of reaching all Israel with his mission. God, the "Lord of the harvest," is to be asked for the workers who are necessary for this. The reason that Jesus called disciples and established a fellowship of disciples thus resides in the fact that he viewed a renewal of all Israel as his task, and in order to fulfill this task he wanted to seek out the whole area that belonged to Israel.

## The new Israel

Together with the circle of the twelve as the core of the Israel that must be renewed, Jesus turned to the people, concretely to the inhabitants of the Galilean locales. His activity thus had an official character: Jesus appeared in the local gatherings and participated in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures of Israel. He went to the Sea of Galilee and to the surrounding areas and delivered public speeches. This must have fascinated and attracted the people. There is repeatedly talk of great crowds gathering to hear Jesus and experience his mighty deeds and bringing their sick to him so that he would heal them. The concern here is with people who were not called like the twelve into the radical form of discipleship but who had a positive stance toward Jesus and accepted his claim to act in the name of God.

> Mark 1.32-33: In the evening when the sun had set they brought all the sick and possessed to him. And the whole city was gathered at the door.

> Mark 2.1-2: When after a few days he came again to Capernaum, it became known that he was in the house. And so many gathered that there was no longer even room at the door, and he proclaimed the word to them.
>
> Mark 2.13: and he went again out to the sea. And the whole crowd came to him, and he taught them.
>
> Mark 3.7: Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea. And a great crowd followed him from Galilee . . .
>
> Cf. also Mark 5.21; 8.1; Luke 7.24 (Q); Matt 5.1; 8.1; John 5.13; 6.2; and elsewhere.

The crowd is thus the addressee of the teaching and the mighty deeds of Jesus. Here we should not think of the Galilean population alone. It is true that the activity of Jesus had its starting point in Galilee, but it soon reached beyond this region. A greater territory already comes into view in Mark 3.7-8. According to this passage, the people who hear about Jesus and approach him come from Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem, Idumea, the region beyond the Jordan, and Tyre and Sidon, thus from the coastal region. The intention of this listing is easy to recognize: we are dealing with a designation of the territory that was conquered or should again be conquered by the twelve tribes according to the witness of the writings of Israel. According to the witness of the Gospel of Mark, the activity of Jesus already reaches all Israel at this point, even if Jesus seeks out the regions beyond Galilee only later.

The turning to Israel especially emerges in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus is portrayed here as the one through whom the hopes of Israel that had long been bound up with the new ruler on the throne of David are fulfilled. He is also given the name "Emmanuel" through the citation from Isa 7.14, which the author immediately translates as meaning "God is with us" (Matt 1.23). The mercy of God with his people who are like sheep without a shepherd appears in Jesus (9.36). In Matthew, the activity of Jesus will then turn also to the Gentiles, and at the end of the Gospel stands the Risen One's explicit commission to make "all nations" into disciples—which in the perspective of Matthew means: Israel and the Gentiles are equally addressees of the mission going forth from Jesus.

In a similar manner to John before him, Jesus must therefore have met with approval from many people with his activity. This is also confirmed by Josephus, who refers to John's success as the reason for his execution by Antipas and also reports about Jesus that he drew many Jews as well as Gentiles to himself.[34] Although Josephus does not bring this directly into connection with his execution, it can nevertheless be assumed that as with John, such a connection also existed with Jesus. When Jesus met with approval with his message of the reign of God that was now being established, this could have appeared as a threat to public order and have come into competition with other forms of rule. I will return to this matter in connection with the causes for the execution of Jesus.

## Purity for the Impure

The turning of Jesus to Israel contains a special accent through the programmatic crossing of the boundaries of clean and unclean.[35] Jesus does not shy away from going into the houses of tax collectors and eating with them there (Luke 19.6); he also explicitly includes sinners in his meal fellowships (Mark 2.15; Luke 15.1-2). It is even told that he allowed his feet to be anointed by a woman sinner (Luke 7.36-39). It is no wonder then that he was called "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7.34 [Q]). He also already came into contact with ritually impure people in the aforementioned healings, as he also did in the encounters with Gentiles.

In order to understand the provocation that resided therein, we must place before our eyes the fact that the boundary between clean and unclean was extremely important for Judaism. Cultic purity was the condition for access to God, whereas impurity excluded one from such access. This is pointedly formulated in Leviticus 10.10 and 11.44: "You shall distinguish between the holy and the unholy, between the clean and the unclean. You shall consecrate yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am holy, the Lord, your God."

Various rules had to be kept to maintain purity: certain foods—for example, pork and sea creatures without fins and scales—were not permitted to be eaten;[36] one was not permitted to come into contact with unclean people, regions, or objects, since one would thereby

become unclean. Impurity was thus "contagious," for which reason one had to be careful to keep away from it. If one became unclean—for example, through menstruation, the birth of a child, leprosy, or contact with a corpse—then purity had to be obtained again through prescribed procedures, such as, for example, ritual washings.[37] It was especially necessary to purify oneself before participating in the temple service, because here one came into direct contact with God. For this reason, the Pharisees endeavored to extend purity into everyday life as far as possible and also, for example, to carry out a purification before eating.[38]

Jesus turned directly on its head this view of purity and impurity: through contact with him the unclean became clean; *purity* was thus "contagious" and spread to impurity. This does not mean that he disdained the purity commandments in general. The narrative of the purification of the leper in Mark 1.40-45 could even show that he was thoroughly in agreement with the purity laws. It is characteristic, however, that he understands purity not as a sphere that must be demarcated from the outside but as an open and extendable sphere. This becomes especially clear through the statement according to which contact with the unclean sphere cannot make unclean: "Nothing that comes from outside into a human being can defile him, but only the things that come out of a human being can make a human being unclean" (Mark 7.15; cf. Matt 15.11).

The primitive Christian view that comes to expression here, which has its origin in the praxis—and possibly also in a corresponding saying—of Jesus, was not simply an annulment of the purity commands. It is nowhere said that the distinction between clean and unclean would be without significance. Rather, what has changed is the relationship between clean and unclean: not the sphere of purity is endangered but that of impurity, for it is driven back by the "offensive [i.e., non-defensive] purity."[39] When the Gospel of Mark comments on the above-cited sentence with the remark "he declared all food clean" (Mark 7.19), then this lies precisely on this line: the distinction between clean and unclean is not declared to be without significance (it does not say: "there is no longer clean and unclean"); rather, the sphere of impurity is drawn into the sphere of purity.

This view played a role in early Christianity both in the clarification of the living together of Jewish and Gentile Christians and in the

legitimation of the Gentile mission. An expression of the former is a passage in Romans; an example of the latter is the legitimation of the Gentile mission in Acts:

> "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean through itself but for the one who reckons something to be unclean, for him it is unclean" (Rom 14.14)
>
> (In view of his refusal to eat unclean animals Peter is exhorted in his vision): "What God has declared to be clean, do not declare this to be unclean" (Acts 10.15)

In 1 Cor 7.14 Paul once more gives this view an expression of his own when he speaks of the unbelieving marriage partner and the common children being sanctified through the believing partner. Here too the sphere of holiness and purity is conceived as an "offensive" [i.e., non-defensive] sphere that spreads itself to those who come into contact with it.

The foundation of this view was Jesus' interpretation of the purity commands. This was a consequence of his view that he was sent for the renewal of Israel. The "lost sheep of the house of Israel" were his first addressees: "Those who are well do not need a physician but those who are sick" (Mark 2.17), thus those who lived on the margins of society or were even excluded from it on account of their sicknesses, their social position, or their occupation (e.g., as toll collectors in the service of Antipas). Only when they are integrated again is the prophetic promise fulfilled that the reestablishment of Israel must include the healing of the blind, lame, and lepers and the proclamation of the good news to the poor. We have already seen that Jesus' activity took place in the horizon of this promise.[40] His view of purity and impurity is therefore a powerful expression of his self-understanding. The renewal of Israel proclaimed by Jesus did not realize itself—as it did, for example, according to the conviction that is expressed in some Qumran writings and presumably also according to the conviction of John the Baptist—through the establishment of a fellowship demarcated from the rest of the people but through the incorporation of all who do the will of God (cf. Mark 3.31-35/*Gos. Thom.* 99; "Homelessness, Discipleship, and the Circle of the Twelve" above)

into the fellowship of the children of God. This can be illustrated through various texts.

The beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain begin with an address to the poor, the hungry, and the mourners who are promised the reversal of their condition into its opposite.[41] In a similar manner as in the answer given to the Baptist in Luke 7.22-23, prophetic tradition also stands in the background here. In this case an especially close connection with Isa 61.1-3 appears, a text that Jesus reads and relates to himself in his inaugural sermon in Nazareth in the Gospel of Luke:

> The Spirit of God, the Lord, rests on me; for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor and to heal all whose heart is broken, so that I proclaim release to the poor and liberation to those who are bound, so that I proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, a day of the vengeance of our God, so that I comfort all who mourn, give joy to the mourners of Zion, bring them jewelry instead of filth, oil of gladness instead of a garment of mourning, praise instead of despair. (Isa 61.1-3)

Luke breaks off the Isaiah quotation after the announcement of the "favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4.18-19). Thus, the reference to the "day of vengeance" and the references to Israel and Zion are missing. With this the text is open for an extension of the boundaries of the people of God. This can be connected well with the intention that can be assumed for Jesus.

Poor people, hungry people, and people who mourn are the first addressees of Jesus' message, the ones to whom he knows himself to be sent as a matter of priority. Whom should one concretely envisage thereby? In our consideration of the Galilean context we came across economic and social differences that resulted from the economic policy of Antipas. The results of this policy included the existence of day laborers, people without fixed work who had to earn their daily living by finding new employment each day. The parable of the workers in the vineyard who are hired at different times of the day reflects this world. Jesus, however, addresses the poor not as losers in relation to a certain economic policy but as human beings for whom the care of

God especially applies and to whom the message of the reign of God must therefore be announced as a matter of priority.

A particular aspect of this turning to the excluded involves Jesus' behavior in relation to Gentiles. We already noted that Jesus also occasionally moved outside of Galilee. Journeys are reported in the Decapolis, in the Syrian-Phoenician coastal region, and to Caesarea Philippi. With this the northern part of the original area of the twelve tribes is marked out. Since Jews also lived in these regions, Jesus will have turned to them in the first instance. At the same time he will also have encountered non-Jews like the Syrophoenician woman about whom Mark 7.24-30 reports:

> Jesus set forth and moved from there into the region of Tyre. He went into a house and wanted no one to know of it. But it could not remain hidden. And immediately a woman heard about him whose daughter had an unclean spirit. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician according to her origin. And she asked him to cast out the demon from her daughter. And he said to her: Let the children be satisfied first; for it is not right to take the bread from the children and throw it to the dogs. She answered him: Lord, even the dogs under the table eat from the crumbs of the children. And he answered her: Because of this word: go your way, the demon has gone out of your daughter. And when she came into her house, she found the child lying on the bed and saw that the demon had gone out.

The episode is informative in multiple respects. It shows first that with his answer to the request of the woman Jesus argues within the framework of the distinction between Jew and Gentile, which is also not annulled! The image of the children and the dogs brings this to expression in a drastic manner, for dogs were regarded as unclean. Therefore, the word was used by Jews as a derogatory designation for Gentiles. Matthew increased this aspect! Here, Jesus explicitly says that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15.24). In Matthew the exclusive sending to Israel is also a component of the commissioning of the disciples: "Do not go on the streets of the Gentiles and do not go into a city of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10.5-6).

In this way Matthew works out an important accent of the activity of Jesus. When, as we already saw, Jesus himself issues the commission also to baptize and teach the Gentiles at the end of Matthew, then the controversy over turning to the Gentiles that primitive Christianity argued out in the middle of the first century already stands in the background. By contrast, this cannot yet be presupposed for Jesus himself. When he sought out regions inhabited by Gentiles, he did so because, according to the traditional Israelite-Jewish conception, they belonged to the territory that Israel was promised by God as a living environment. When he encountered Gentiles in the process—as in the scene from Mark 7.24-30 described above—it was more a matter of chance meetings that were not intended by Jesus.

At the same time, it comes to expression in the episode that Jesus also did not adopt a stance of rejection toward the Gentiles in principle. His initial rebuff is overcome through the persistence of the woman, who therein demonstrates, as Matthew explicitly emphasizes, her great faith. A comparable encounter is the one with the centurion or royal official, of which a version has been handed down in Matthew and Luke and another one in John.[42] This person turns to Jesus with the request that he heal his servant (in John it is his son). But he does not wish to trouble Jesus by having him come to his house; rather a word from him would be enough to heal the servant. As with the Syrophoenician woman, here too it is the faith of the centurion that moves Jesus to grant him the fulfillment of his request. The episode culminates in the pronouncement of Jesus: I have not found such faith in Israel.

The sporadic encounters with Gentiles thus belong in the context of the activity of Jesus directed to Israel. Jesus' positive stance toward Gentiles must therefore be distinguished from the subsequent programmatic Gentile mission of primitive Christianity, even if it could have provided impulses for this mission.[43] It is founded on the conviction of the "offensive [i.e., non-defensive] purity" that in individual cases could lead to the crossing over of the boundaries of Israel. It makes clear in addition that for Jesus faith in the God of Israel and in him being the representative of this God is the decisive presupposition for participating in the reign of God. Therefore, Jesus can polemically hold the faith of the centurion before the eyes of his Jewish contemporaries; therefore, he can also state that people will come

from all directions to recline at the table in the reign of God, whereas those from Israel who have rejected his message will fall under judgment (Luke 13.28-29 [Q]). If the Baptist had already indicated that descent from Abraham was no guarantee of salvation, then this is taken up by Jesus and connected with his invitation to the reign of God. It is no wonder that he did not meet only with approval thereby.

## Opponents

It has already become clear that Jesus' activity had a polarizing effect. Thus, a positive Galilean phase and a negative phase in Jerusalem do not stand over against each other. Discipleship and acceptance on the one hand and rejection and enmity on the other hand first come into view not in Jerusalem but already during his activity in Galilee.

As has become evident, the controversies arose on account of the claim with which Jesus appeared. The one who did not accept this claim quickly became an opponent. A saying that is handed down in connection with the Beelzebul controversy captures this in a nutshell: "The one who is not with me is against me; the one who does not gather with me scatters" (Q 11.23).

The concern is with the connection between the activity of Jesus—the gathering of Israel—and the demand that one not shut oneself off from it. The alternative would be opposition and with this "scattering." Thus, the one who stands against Jesus simultaneously stands against God and his promise to gather the Israel that is scattered among the Gentile nations at the end of time.[44]

Thus, the opponents of Jesus were in the first instance his Galilean contemporaries who rejected his claim. This did not always immediately have to mean open enmity. The "opponents" of Jesus evidently also included people from his environment, which Jesus first declared to be such because they did not want to enter into his following, whereas he did not tolerate any neutrality: the one who was not for him was against him.

The Pharisees stood in substantial competition with Jesus. I have already said something about their historical origin and profile above.[45] As experts in the application of the Jewish law in everyday life, the Pharisees were to some extent the natural opponents of Jesus.

But one must not envisage this in such a way that here a narrow Jewish legalism came into conflict with the open proclamation for all of the limitless love of God through Jesus. Such a picture, which was occasionally sketched at an earlier time, would do justice neither to the historical profile of the Pharisees nor to that of Jesus. Rather, the competition arose through the fact that both claimed to mediate to the people the teachings and behavioral patterns that were necessary for an intact relationship to God. Both had all Israel in view as the addressees of their teaching. The conflict was therefore absolutely unavoidable. If the Pharisees were convinced that cultic purity should also determine everyday life, then this was a competing model to the above-sketched model of an "offensive" [i.e., non-defensive] outwardly spreading purity that Jesus propagated.

The Pharisees are the main competitors of Jesus during his Galilean activity. In the trial against Jesus and in his execution, however, they do not play a role. This is historically plausible insofar as the Pharisees were not a politically powerful group at the time of Jesus but certainly had influence. When Mark has them make a resolution to kill Jesus together with the "Herodians," then this is already a later view in which the Pharisees in conjunction with supporters of the Herodian dynasty pave the way for the execution of Jesus. That the concrete occasion—the controversy over the Sabbath command described in Mark 3.1-6—should have led to a resolution to kill him is, by contrast, completely improbable, for Jesus' understanding of the law was by no means worthy of death in Judaism.[46] Therefore, the causes for the execution of Jesus also could not lie in the controversies over the law. Rather, these controversies are an expression of his more far-reaching claim to divine authority. We have already struck upon this in relation to the question "God or Satan?," and we will encounter it again at a later point.[47]

# 9

# The Reign of God in the Proclamation of Jesus

Jesus understood his activity as an expression of the Spirit of God working in him, through which he drove back the already-broken reign of Satan. The concept that he placed at the center of his activity was "reign of God," more precisely "kingly reign of God." We have already encountered this expression in the context of the interpretation of the exorcisms (Q 11.20); beyond this it frequently occurs in the sayings and parables of Jesus. Therefore, in what follows we will first examine the meaning of this expression more closely in order to then describe its use in the proclamation of Jesus.

## What Does the Concept "Reign of God" Mean?

The expression "kingly reign of God" has its background in texts from the Old Testament and Judaism. Here the notion that Yahweh is an eternal king is common, and not only over Israel (so, e.g., Ps 10.16; 44.5) but also over the whole world. This is usually formulated with the use of a verb ("God reigns as king"), whereas the expression "kingly reign of God" occurs only rarely. It is, however, occasionally attested.

> Ps 103.19: Yahweh has prepared his throne in heaven, his kingly reign rules over all.
>
> Ps 145.13: Your kingly reign is an everlasting kingly reign and your power reaches from generation to generation.

This notion was first related to the present history: God presently rules the world; the place of his veneration is the Jerusalem temple; he is represented through the king. The visible expression of the kingly reign of God was therefore the temple cult as well as the ritual of the anointing of the king, which symbolized the special position of the king before God. The so-called Zion psalms (46; 48; 76; 84; 87) speak of Yahweh's choice of Zion—the city of Jerusalem represented by the temple and palace of the king—as his dwelling place. In the so-called *Jahwe-Königspsalmen* or enthronement psalms (47; 93; 96-99), his ascension to the throne is praised (Ps 93.1; 96.10; 97.1). It is possible that a corresponding ritual even stands behind this in which these psalms were sung. The notion that at the end all the nations will come to Zion is also an expression of faith in Yahweh's universal reign.

The downfall of Judah, in connection with the deportation of considerable parts of the population in the Babylonian exile, the dispersion of Israel among the nations, and the reign of foreign rulers in the land promised by God led to a new specification of the relation of the kingly reign of God to historical reality. This process began in the time of the exile and continued in the following centuries, thus in a time during which Israel stood under the rule of different peoples—Persians, Greeks, Romans. In this period the expectation of the eschatological establishment of God's kingdom, which is attested in numerous Jewish texts, arose.

The expectation of the future establishment of the reign of God was occasionally combined with that of a renewal of the Davidic kingdom. For this, recourse was made to Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam 7.2-16, which promises David an everlasting kingdom, thus, for example, in the so-called Messianic *Florilegium* from Qumran (4Q174), which expects the fulfillment of this promise in the future. In the *Psalms of Solomon*, a collection of eighteen psalms from the first century BCE, the future Davidide is referred to as "the Lord's Anointed," and it is expected from him that he will purify Jerusalem of the Gentiles and rule Israel with wisdom and righteousness.

This background is naturally already significant for the activity of Jesus because the expression "Anointed One" (Messiah, Christ) is also applied to Jesus. Therefore, the notions bound up with this expression must also have played a role in the interpretation of his activity. We will need to inquire more closely into how far Jesus fulfilled the expectations for the Davidic Anointed One, that is, how his activity can be understood in the framework of these early Jewish notions.[1]

A special form of the expectation of a future establishment of God's power is found in apocalyptic thought. It starts from an opposition between a disastrous present and the future time of salvation brought about by God. The first traces of this view are found in corresponding additions to prophetic books of the Old Testament.[2] Additional Jewish writings work out this view. In doing so they usually make use of a great figure from the history of Israel: visions of the establishment of the reign of God that will prepare an end for the present evil age are composed under the name of Enoch, Moses, Ezra, or Baruch. In contrast to the expectation described above, the apocalyptic view starts from the conviction that God's reign will be brought about through a final battle that prepares an end for all earthly kingdoms and in which God himself will conquer the adversary. The tension between the earthly reality and the future time of salvation is extended to the extreme, for which reason apocalyptic thought also speaks of a comprehensive renewal of the world that will include nature itself. Thus, in apocalyptic thought we are dealing with a form of theology of history. God's power over the world is upheld, but its earthly establishment is expected to entail the destruction of the present world and the bringing about of a new world.

In the *Assumption of Moses*, an apocalyptic writing whose final version presumably arose at the beginning of the first century CE, there is talk of a cruel king's reign of terror at the end of which a faithful Jew from the tribe of Levi named Taxo will prove himself. In chapter 10 the reign of God that will follow this time is then described:

1. And then his kingdom will appear in his entire creation. And then the devil will come to an end, and sadness will be carried away together with him.

2. Then, the hands of the messenger, when he will be in heaven, will be filled, and he will then avenge them against their enemies.
3. For the Heavenly One will rise from his royal throne, and he will go out from his holy habitation with anger and wrath on account of his sons.
4. And the earth will tremble until its extremes it will be shaken, and the high mountains will be made low, and they will be shaken, and the valleys will sink.
5. The sun will not give its light, and the horns of the moon will turn into darkness, and they will be broken; and (sc. the moon) will entirely be turned into blood, and the orbit of the stars will be upset.
6. And the sea will fall back into the abyss, and the fountains of the waters will defect and the rivers will recoil.
7. For the Highest God, the sole Eternal One, will rise, and he will manifest himself in order to punish the nations, and to destroy all their idols.
8. Then you will be happy, Israel, and you will mount on the neck and the wings of an eagle, and they will be filled,
9. And God will exalt you, and make you live in the heaven of the stars, the place of his habitation.
10. And you will look down from above, and you will see your enemies on the earth, and you will recognize them. And you will rejoice, and you will thank and praise your Creator.[3]

Here the establishment of God's reign is expected as the eschatological victory of God over the devil.[4] This will simultaneously bring an end to the present rule of the Gentiles, destroy the entire earth, and exalt Israel to God.

In the context of the apocalyptic conception the figure of the Son of Man occasionally plays a role. The concern here is with a heavenly figure to whom God has transferred his power and who will carry out the judgment on the world. This conception first occurs in Dan 7.13-14, and it is subsequently taken up again in two Jewish texts, namely in *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*.

The significance of apocalyptic thought for early Christianity does not lie only in the fact that with the Revelation of John an early

Christian apocalypse found entrance into the New Testament. In the Jesus tradition itself apocalyptic elements can also be found. These include first the judgment sayings that speak of a division into those who are saved and those who are lost, and second the talk of an end-time tribulation when Jesus comes again for the eschatological judgment. There is talk of the sun becoming dark and the moon no longer giving light and of the Son of Man who will come on the clouds and gather the elect.[5] For this recourse is made to the prophecy from Daniel 7; the figure of a Son of Man mentioned there is now identified with Jesus who comes again for judgment. The elaboration of the end-time judgment of the Son of Man can presumably be understood as an early Christian continuation of Jesus' claim to establish God's reign. Here, the great speech about the separation into goats and sheep from Matt 25.31-46 has been especially influential, not least in the visual arts.

In spite of the problems posed by such judgment scenes, the original intention behind them must not be overlooked. The victory of good over evil, of righteousness over unrighteousness, necessarily belongs to the notion of God's rule over the world.

One will therefore have to ask how the talk of the Son of Man Jesus who comes again for judgment relates to the proclamation of Jesus himself. The designation of Jesus as Son of Man is firmly anchored in the Jesus tradition. At the same time, it will become clear that not all the Son of Man sayings go back to Jesus himself. Rather, taking up a manner of speech of Jesus, the expression serves to work out his function in the post-Easter period. One must therefore distinguish between the use by Jesus and the later development.

The findings can be summarized as follows: the fact that God ruled as everlasting king was firmly anchored in the Jewish faith of the time of Jesus. His kingdom was therefore praised in the manner that was cited above in the psalm verses. The place for this was especially prayers and hymns, thus liturgical texts. This shows that even when Jerusalem was no longer the place at which the reign of God visibly manifested itself, the existence of this reign was not in doubt. Its ability to be experienced, however, now shifted to the cult. Thus, we find, for example, in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from Qumran, the notion of the present reign of God, which is celebrated in the heavenly worship service and in which one participates in the celebration of the Sabbath liturgy. A similar view of the significance

of the Sabbath is found in *Jubilees*. In prayers one often encounters statements about God's everlasting kingdom over the whole creation.

In light of the historical experiences, however, God's reign became an entity whose establishment one expected in the future. This expectation was directed to the vindication of Israel, the defeat of the foreign rulers or the devil himself, and the placement again of Israel as God's chosen people in its original position. This juxtaposition of praise of the present reign of God and expectation of its future earthly establishment has to be kept in view for Jesus' talk about the reign of God.

## Jesus' Talk about the Reign of God

That the God of Israel reigned as king over the world was a given presupposition of Jewish faith that Jesus also shared. As we have already seen, he even pushed this notion to the center of his activity. His talk of the kingly reign of God stands in close connection with the previously discussed link to John the Baptist. Its special character in comparison with the early Jewish notions described above consists in the announcement of its *present establishment*. On the one hand, the connection between God's reign and his judgment obtains fundamental significance through this, and on the other hand, it means the announcement of the time of salvation. This will be developed in greater detail in what follows.

### Reign of God and judgment

Jesus takes over from John the view that the history of Israel stands before a fundamental turning point. The judgment of God is near; the separation into those who are saved and those who are lost will pass right through Israel. This results in the absoluteness of the demand to enter into the reign of God as the only possibility of escaping judgment. This aspect especially comes to expression in a number of texts from Q.

> Then there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you will see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the reign of God but you will be thrown out. And they will come from east and west, and from north and south and will recline at the table in the reign of God. (Q 13.28-29)

As with John, it is also not sufficient with Jesus to appeal to one's belonging to God's covenant with the ancestors. Jesus even says that others, namely non-Israelites, thus Gentiles, will be in the reign of God, whereas the "sons of the reign of God," thus Israelites, could be excluded. John had made use of a similar formulation: God can raise up children to Abraham from stones, that is, he can seek out a new people if the present one does not bear fruit. Jesus appeals in the above-cited saying to the tradition of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion and intensifies it through his talk of the casting out of Israel.

Here the concern is neither with the annulment of the promises of God to his people nor even with Gentile mission. Rather, the provocation lies in the fact that the separation into righteous and unrighteous that accompanies the reign of God according to Jewish-apocalyptic tradition is no longer oriented to the opposition of Israel and the Gentiles but passes right through Israel: only some will belong to it, whereas others will be excluded. The standard for this is one's belonging to the fellowship established by Jesus. The reference to the possibility that others could take the place of Israel, thus that the people of God can be "replaced," is thereby a polemical intensification that especially emphasizes the necessity of repentance. This is reinforced by additional traditions.

> This generation is an evil generation. It demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it, except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The queen of the south will arise at the judgment with the men of this generation and will condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment and will condemn it. For they repented at the message of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Q 11.29-32)

At the judgment, when the establishment of the reign of God will be completed, it will be tested whether the required repentance was actually carried out. In a similar manner as in the previously cited text, here too Gentiles are placed before one's eyes as models: the queen of the south and the people of Nineveh allowed themselves to be addressed by the wisdom of king Solomon and Jonah's prophetic call for repentance—how much more must the contemporaries of Jesus do so, who are Israelites and before whom something greater in wisdom and prophecy stands than those named. Therefore, Jesus' words of judgment are also directed to them, the inhabitants of the places in which he appeared.

> Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works that took place in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. (Q 10.13-15)

Chorazin, Bethsaida, even Capernaum, where Jesus frequently stays, are the addressees of these radical words. Again, Gentiles are set up as models, this time the inhabitants of the coastal cities Tyre and Sidon.

There is also talk of judgment in the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14.16-24/Matt 22.1-10).[6] The reign of God is portrayed there, in a similar manner as in Q 13.28-29, in the picture of a festive meal. A repeated invitation to come is issued, which those invited, however, refuse, so that the host invites others to the banquet in their place. Again, we encounter the provocative replacement of the ones who were invited first. This must not necessarily be related to non-Israelites. Sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes, that is the sort of people whom one would not reckon among the first addressees of an invitation to the reign of God, could also be in mind.

Thus, the thematic contours of Jesus' talk of the reign of God are closely related to the message of John. Like John, Jesus starts from the necessity of repentance, from which no one is exempted. The background of this radical view of the situation of Israel is the conviction of the immediate nearness of God, which places the sinfulness and unholiness of human beings in a sharp light. Therefore, the

announcement of God's judgment is taken up with singular intensification, and it pertains to Israel itself in the first instance.

The difference from John is that with Jesus the judgment completes the establishment of the reign of God that has already begun with the victory over Satan. If John sharply and directly set the judgment of God over against the present situation, then with Jesus the reign of God that was in the process of being established connected present and future. Thus, with Jesus the eschatological-apocalyptic traditions of the end-time gathering of the people of God and of the battle of God against Satan were drawn into the present time. Therefore, the nearness of God not only means the pressing immediacy of judgment, but also simultaneously opens up the singular possibility of entering into a completely new relationship to God. Jesus connects this possibility exclusively with the establishment of the reign of God that is tied to his own activity.

The connection between reign of God and judgment that is specific to the proclamation of Jesus is also reflected in the frequently encountered call to watchfulness. In various images the sudden breaking in of the reign of God at an unexpected point in time is emphasized. It comes as a thief in the night, unobserved and unexpected, and it will separate those who are prepared for its arrival from those who have not reckoned with it.

> But know this: if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, then he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. You too keep yourself ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour at which you do not expect it. But Peter said: Lord, do you mean us or all with this parable? And the Lord said: who then is the faithful and sensible steward whom the lord places over his service attendants to give out the food portions at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he comes, finds doing this! Truly I say to you: he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says in his heart: My lord is not coming back for yet a long time and he begins to beat the menservants and maidservants, to eat and to drink, and to become drunk, then the lord of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. And he will cut him in pieces and assign him a place among the unbelievers. But that servant who knew the will of his lord, but did not prepare anything or act according to his will, will receive many beatings. But the one who did

> not know, and does what deserves beatings, will receive few beatings. But to everyone to whom much has been given—much will be required from him; and to the one to whom much has been entrusted—from him they will require all the more. (Luke 12.39-48; cf. Matt 24.43-51)

Two images are bound up with each other in this text: the thief who breaks in and the returning lord of the house. Through these images the unexpected coming of the reign of God and the account that will be required are portrayed as a joint occurrence.

Additional images develop these aspects: the reign of God will surprise people in the carelessness of daily life, in the night, or while working (Q 17.23-37; cf. also the parable of the rich fool, Luke 12.16-21). The fact that the establishment of the reign of God takes place in the horizon of the end-time judgment, whose sudden arrival should always be present to people, also comes to expression in the image of the harvest. This is a common image in Israelite-Jewish tradition for the judgment, which is more frequently applied in the Jesus tradition to the completion of the reign of God. Thus, for example, in the parables of the self-growing seed (Mark 4.26-29) and the weeds among the wheat (Matt 13.24-30), the depiction of the harvest serves as a reference to the end-time judgment of God.

The account that is then required concerning how one "did business with" the entrusted good is thematized, for example, in the parable of the entrusted minas/talents (Luke 19.12-27/Matt 25.14-30): the third servant who did not increase the entrusted good is punished. In the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins (Matt 25.1-13) a separation is also made between those who showed themselves to be worthy of the reign of God (in the image: who had enough oil with them) and those whose dedication was inadequate (in the image: who concerned themselves with oil only when it was too late). The parable concludes with a call to watchfulness, since one knows neither the day nor the hour (v. 13).

Thus, the connection between the reign of God and judgment emphasizes first the absolute necessity of joining oneself to the "new family" established by Jesus, since this alone leads to preservation in the judgment. This connection means further that the reign of God that is now dawning confronts human beings with the requirement that they completely commit themselves to it. Half-heartedness does

not suffice; the dedication that one is prepared to accomplish will provide the standard according to which judgment is then made. Finally, the horizon of the coming judgment means, third, that one must always be ready, for the reign of God does not come in such a way that one could foresee it and prepare oneself accordingly, but rather it breaks in unexpectedly, as the flood or the judgment on Sodom (Luke 17.26-30) once did. When this sudden breaking in is described as the unexpected coming of the Son of Man, who will appear as a flash of lightning in the sky (Luke 17.24), then this points to the close connection between the reign of God and the activity of Jesus. We will need to return to this connection at a later point.

## The reign of God as the beginning of the time of salvation

The announcement of the reign of God dawning in Jesus' activity did not confront his contemporaries only with the judgment. It simultaneously marked the present as the time of salvation. This aspect is grounded in Jesus' consciousness of his specific role in God's plan of salvation, which can possibly be traced back to the visionary experience mentioned above.[7] This new situation is described in greater detail on various occasions:

> Blessed are the eyes which see what you see and the ears that hear what you hear. Amen I say to you: many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it. (Q 10.23-24)

The time of Jesus is a time of joy, a time of meals that are open to all, the time of the salvific turning of God to human beings.

In spite of the conviction of a changed situation vis-à-vis John, Jesus could certainly have been of the opinion that John also belonged in the time of the dawning reign of God. A saying of Jesus concerning this matter exists in two versions:

> The law and the prophets (reach) until John. From then on the reign of God is proclaimed and everyone presses with violence into it. (Luke 16.16)

> From the days of John the Baptist until now the reign of God has suffered violence and violent people take it by force. For all the prophets and the law have prophesied until John. (Matt 11.12-13)

It is clear here that the reign of God is an entity that is present at the time of Jesus, which can only for this reason suffer violence. It is not clear, by contrast, whether John still belongs to the preceding epoch, thus to the law and prophets, or alternatively to the epoch of the reign of God. The question cannot be clearly determined linguistically, since "until" can be used inclusively or exclusively in Greek as it also can in German (and English). In Matthew it is evidently understood exclusively: law and prophets end immediately before John; the time of the reign of God begins with "the days of John the Baptist." This was probably also the understanding of Jesus who estimated John very highly and received decisive impulses from John's activity for his own activity.

Thus, John and Jesus confront their contemporaries in respectively distinct ways with the absolute demand of God: the one as an ascetic wilderness preacher, the other as the issuer of invitations to open meals of the reign of God. Thus, they have their own respective functions in relation to the reign of God: John prepares the people with his preaching of repentance for the coming of the reign of God; Jesus celebrates its dawning with them. Jesus therefore also exhorts his disciples to proclaim the dawning of the reign of God and to participate in its establishment: "Heal the sick among you and say to them: the reign of God has come to you" (Q 10.9).

A parallel to the announcement of the reign of God that has come is found in the previously quoted sentence with which Mark summarizes the activity of Jesus at the beginning of his work.[8] A further connection exists with Q 11.20,[9] where there is talk of the connection between Jesus' driving out of demons and the dawning of the reign of God. Exorcisms of demons and healings of sick people carried out by him or in his name are thus signs of the reign of God that is now dawning. It is true that a different Greek verb is used in Q 11.20 than in Q 10.9 and Mark 1.15. This has led to the question of whether a somewhat different understanding lies behind them: in the first case the concern is said to be with an actual *arrival*, whereas the second is only with a *having come near*. Presumably, however, the same thing is

meant in both cases: the verb "to come near" in the second case is used in the perfect; it thus designates the reign of God that *has come along* and is *now present*.

The presence of the reign of God requires that one pay attention to it, thus that one understand how to interpret the signs of the time:

> When he was asked by the Pharisees when the reign of God was coming, he answered them and said: the reign of God does not come in such a way that one can observe it. One will not say: look, here it is! Or: There it is! For behold, the reign of God is in the midst of you. (Luke 17.20-21)

What is meant here is that the reign of God takes place in Jesus' activity, directly before the eyes of his contemporaries. Similarly, *Gos. Thom.* 113 speaks of the reign of God being spread over the earth but not perceived by human beings. This does not stand in opposition to the sayings about the sudden breaking in of the reign of God cited in the previous section. Rather, it shows that the future in-breaking will complete what has already begun in the present. Therefore, one should not keep a lookout for what is future but orient oneself toward the already present signs of the reign of God.

It corresponds to this that Jesus can also point to the future completion of the reign of God. This is shown first by the talk of the establishment of the reign of God as bringing about the time of salvation for the excluded and disadvantaged. The proclamation of the good news to the poor is already a fixed component of God's eschatological action in the prophetic promises. Jesus takes up this expectation, for example in the beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Plain or the Sermon on the Mount.

> Blessed are the poor; for theirs is the reign of God.
> Blessed are those who hunger; for they will become filled.
> Blessed are those who mourn; for they will laugh.
> (Luke 6.20-21/Matt 5.3-4, 6)

The poor, the hungry, and the mourners are already to be declared blessed now because the establishment of the reign of God that is promised to them and will turn around their plight has begun. We

already saw that with the poor and hungry Jesus undoubtedly had in view the people of his time who were actually in need. When he understands the reign of God as an entity that is in the process of dawning through his activity, then this must take place first and above all in the place where his activity is actually carried out. It has also become clear that it would fall short of the mark to understand Jesus' talk of the reign of God as a social or political program. Jesus takes up the Israelite-Jewish conception of the reign of God and interprets it in the horizon of John the Baptist's preaching of repentance with a view to the imminent judgment. In this way, both themes are placed in a tension-filled relationship with each other. Thus, the perspective of Jesus is that of the history of Israel; what occupies him is the renewal of the relation of Israel to God. That this also produces social and political implications is clear. It is equally apparent, however, that these were a *consequence* of his view of the situation of Israel before God and his own task and not *what prompted* his activity.

Another example of the connection between present and future is the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. When God is petitioned here concerning the coming of his kingdom ("your kingdom come"), then this is a prayer for the completion of what has already begun. This brings the movement of the prayer as a whole to expression.[10] The address of God as Father, which admittedly also occurs in other Jewish prayers,[11] is placed with Jesus, however, in an especially pointed manner at the beginning of the prayer, and the prayer for the sanctification of his name combines trust and nearness to God with reverence for his holiness in a unique manner. Only God himself can see to it that his name is hallowed by human beings and his reign established on earth. Only he, however, can also ultimately guarantee the daily provision of human beings with what is essential for life; only he can forgive them their sins. Thus, in the Lord's Prayer petitions that are related to the preservation of life and fellowship, thus to the present, are connected with ones that ask God for the still outstanding establishment of his holiness and reign. The Lord's Prayer is therefore an impressive witness to the fact that Jesus' activity was equally oriented to present preservation and future completion. It becomes simultaneously clear that the apocalyptic perspective of the aforementioned Jewish texts has experienced an important alteration with Jesus: with these texts he shares the conviction of the universal power of God

over history and his victory over Satan. But the establishment of his power does not mean a destruction of the present world. Rather, it realizes itself as a process that is already under way that will transform the present world.

Jesus' talk of the present as a time of salvation thus shows that with the apocalyptic depictions of the Gospels we are dealing with developments of Jesus' proclamation from a later time. These texts again develop more strongly the contrast between the present world and the future reign of God than was the case with Jesus himself. If Jesus' parables of growth describe a process and thus do not place the present in unbridgeable opposition to the future, then the portrayal of the cosmic events at the coming again of the Son of Man is close to the apocalyptic tradition, which depicts the establishment of God's reign as the destruction of the present world. These texts thus reflect the situation of hostility and persecution in which the early Christian communities again emphasized the contrast between their present and the future of the reign of God with recourse to apocalyptic tradition.

The reign of God in the proclamation and activity of Jesus is thus a dynamic entity: it takes place before the eyes of Jesus' contemporaries; it transforms the present world by establishing the victory of God over Satan; it can be envisaged as a sphere into which one enters or as a banquet in which one participates. Therefore, the conception of the *reign* of God can be more strongly emphasized at one point, whereas that of his *kingdom* can be stressed at other points.

Thus, for Jesus—in contrast to the Jewish texts discussed above—the present and future of the reign of God are neither temporally nor spatially separated from each other. The reign of God dawns in the present and leads to its completion. It is therefore not an entity that one can participate in only through prayer and cult. Rather, its beginnings can be experienced, even if it is a matter of small, often inconspicuous beginnings. Therefore, it would not be sensible to divide the statements of Jesus about the reign of God into those related to the present and those related to the future. This would precisely fail to recognize the central thrust of Jesus' conception of the dynamic, on-the-move reign of God.

This dynamic can be illustrated with the parable of the mustard seed, which belongs to the oldest material of the Jesus tradition:

> With what shall we compare the reign of God, and with what parable shall we portray it? It is like a mustard seed: when it is sown on the earth it is smaller than all the seeds on the earth. But when it is sown it comes up and becomes greater than all the plants and puts forth large branches so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade. (Mark 4.30-32)

There is another version of this parable in Q. There, it is handed down as a double parable with the parable of the leaven.

> He said: What is the reign of God like, and with what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a human being took and sowed in his garden. And it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches. And again he said: With what shall I compare the reign of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until it was completely leavened. (Luke 13.18-21; cf. Matt 13.31-33)

In Mark the contrast between the small seed and the great plant is emphasized. The comparison with the reign of God then means: even if the beginning is small and inconspicuous, the end will be enormous and stand in an unexpected contrast to the beginnings that are now scarcely perceptible. With this the author of the Gospel of Mark makes clear that even if the activity of Jesus has not yet led to tangible changes—his followers are even persecuted and taken to court—there is no doubt that his activity means the dawning of the reign of God. In the language of the image: the seed is already sown, the process of growth has thus begun.

Mark thus makes the parable of Jesus fruitful for a later situation in which the early communities faced hostilities and persecutions. But the parable also reflected the inconspicuousness of the reign of God a number of decades earlier within the framework of the activity of Jesus:[12] When Jesus healed people in the villages around the sea of Galilee, when he encountered people who trusted in him in the Decapolis and the coastal region, and when he found followers and sympathizers and yet also opponents in the places of his activity, in view of the aforementioned expectations of historical or even cosmic upheavals, this would scarcely have been identified as the dawning of the reign of God. For this, spectacular events would have been needed that allowed no doubt about who Jesus was. But this was precisely

what was contested. The inconspicuous beginnings had to be interpreted by those who experienced them as also *actually* the dawning of the reign of God, for they were by no means unambiguous. Therein resided the special challenge for the contemporaries of Jesus, then also for the authors of the Gospels, who already looked back to the exclusions and persecutions of the early Christian communities, and finally for later generations of Christians down to the present.

The version of the parable of the mustard seed from Q contributes another aspect. The description of the mustard seed as the smallest of all the seeds and the fully grown plant as the greatest is absent from the Lukan version, which is probably closer to Q than the version in Matthew.[13] Here, the accent lies more strongly on the growth than the contrast: a human being sowed the seed; it grew and became a tree. This is then explained further through the parable of the leaven. Here too there is talk of the action of a human being—this time it is a woman—who leavens a great batch of dough with a little leaven. It also happens in this manner with the reign of God: the small events in a rural province in the east, which are completely unnoticed in the Roman Empire, are the beginning of a transformation that will take hold of the entire world. The dynamic of the reign of God consists in the small, inconspicuous beginnings that are spreading and will ultimately transform the entire world.

Experiences that Jesus himself already had undoubtedly stand behind the talk of the inconspicuousness of the reign of God. The judgment sayings discussed in the previous section speak of rejection. The conflicts surrounding the interpretation of the law and the controversies surrounding his claim to act in the name of God also point in this direction. The radicality with which he placed his Jewish contemporaries before the alternative "salvation or judgment" also surely contributed to the intensification. It is therefore probable that Jesus did not first come into conflict with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Rather, a corresponding conflict will have already emerged during his activity in Galilee, even if it did not yet intensify there to a life-threatening situation.

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# 10

# Life in Light of the Reign of God

## *The Ethos of Jesus*

The announcement of the reign of God that was in the process of dawning also included the specification of a particular way of life. In the portrayal of this dimension of the activity of Jesus, one should start from two presuppositions.

The first presupposition says that Jesus did not develop a systematic doctrine about life in light of the reign of God. Rather, he formulated rules of behavior in concrete situations, which admittedly often have a fundamental character. These rules must be understood against the background of the characteristic features of his activity presented in the last section: his claim on Israel, his establishment of a distinct fellowship of disciples, and his understanding of the dawning reign of God. Therefore, the foundations are, first, the time that is newly qualified by the dawning reign of God, which demands special rules of behavior, and, second, the validity of the Jewish law, which is presupposed as a given. On account of this situational character, it is better to speak of the *ethos* rather than the *ethic* of Jesus.[1] Should these instructions be made into the foundation of an ethics of Christianity, then one must necessarily introduce systematic and hermeneutical considerations that place the situation of Jesus and that of the Christian church in relation to each other.

An initial summary of the instructions of Jesus that has such a character is already found in the New Testament—namely in the Sermon on the Mount. Here we are dealing with a speech configured by the evangelist Matthew in which the teaching of Jesus is brought into the form of a community ethic. It is no accident that the Sermon on the Mount has therefore also often been understood as the center of a Christian ethic and as such has developed its own *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Here, the concern is thoroughly with a materially appropriate reception and further development of the teaching of Jesus. The decisive point of difference from the teaching of Jesus himself resides, however, in the fact that it was now detached from its original context of application and placed in new contexts. In the process, questions came up that were also bound up with its adaption to the new situations—such as, for example, the question of whether the radical demands of the Sermon on the Mount could be fulfilled—questions that continue to arise up to the present (cf. "The Sermon on the Mount: Impacts of the Ethos of Jesus" in ch. 14).

The second presupposition says: in the instructions of Jesus a distinction must be made between instructions that are related to the fellowship of his disciples and instructions that apply to the Israel that is to be renewed as a whole. This should not be understood as a difference between an ethos for the "perfect" and an ethos for the "ordinary people." Rather, the distinction results from a sociological consideration: as seen above, Jesus called human beings to follow him immediately, namely the symbolic circle of the twelve and a further circle of male and female disciples who shared his manner of life. The majority of people in Galilee did not, of course, belong to this fellowship of itinerant messengers but were instead their addressees: the inhabitants of the Galilean locales in which Jesus and his companions were active and to whom Jesus sent his disciples in order for them to continue his activity. This distinction also finds expression in the ethical instructions of Jesus. They are oriented in part to his direct followers and in part to the Israel that is to be renewed as a whole. Thus, for example, Jesus can on the one hand make a summons to break with the family, and on the other hand radically forbid divorce—which was not prohibited in principle according to the Jewish law. It is obvious that both cannot be directed to the same addressee. Rather, the above-described structure of a fellowship of disciples as the core of the Israel that is to

be renewed is reflected here. In this chapter we will deal first with the ethos of the disciples of Jesus, then with the ethos for Israel as a whole, and finally with Jesus' stance toward the Jewish law.

## Anticipation of the Reign of God: The Ethos of the Disciples of Jesus

The ethos of the followers of Jesus is characterized by a number of instructions that can be sociologically related to the life of a fellowship that follows special rules on account of their radical character. These include, first, the aforementioned exhortation to sever familial relations and to give up one's possessions. Alongside the direct exhortations to follow, this ethos also comes to expression in the parables that speak of an uncompromising prioritization of the reign of God:

> The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a human being found and hid again, and in his joy he went and sold all that he possessed and bought that field. And again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who sought fine pearls. But when he found a pearl of great value he went and sold all that he possessed and bought it. (Matt 13.44-46)

The point of both parables is the incomparable value of the reign of God, which causes those who find it to give up their possessions. In the process a somewhat different constellation is described: in the first parable a person comes *by chance* upon the treasure; in the second the merchant *searches* for fine pearls. The reign of God can unexpectedly encounter a person and determine his life from then on. But even if one was already searching for it, its "discovery" is overwhelming and leads to a new life orientation.

Matthew has generalized the parables and related them fundamentally to the orientation to the reign of God. With the expression "and he went and sold all that he possessed," which connects the two parables, he has, however, preserved a different accent that places it in the ethos of the radical renunciation of possessions of Jesus' fellowship of disciples. With this he simultaneously makes clear that a corresponding stance toward possessions should also continue to be valid for the Christian community.

If "following" is to be taken literally for the time of Jesus, then it means a new form of existence. That a considerable irritation resided in this requirement is clear: the decision to share in the itinerant existence of Jesus did not simply mean to not hang one's heart on earthly possessions but above all to care no longer for one's own family, to leave parents, spouse and children, and house and farm to themselves in order to henceforth wander around with Jesus and proclaim the dawning of the reign of God. The texts in which this ethos comes to expression are the already-discussed discourses on discipleship that mention the break with family and the lack of place and possessions as characteristic features of following Jesus.[2]

This is made more concrete in the mission discourse. This programmatic speech brings to expression the features that characterize the activity of Jesus' followers. Here Jesus exhorts his disciples to forgo everything that belonged to the equipment of a traveler in antiquity: provisions, money, shoes, a second garment, and a staff for protection. The meaning of this exhortation does not lie in a programmatic expression of one's lack of needs as with the Cynics, who wanted to demonstrate their independence from material possessions with their activity. There is, however, also a connection in the Jesus fellowship between the manner of the disciples' activity and the content of the message that was to be announced. The activity of the messengers is a symbolic action, an anticipation of the order of the reign of God: the reign of God totally claims human beings; everything else, even the concern for protection and daily support, becomes unimportant.

This is closely connected with another text that is closely related to the sending out of the disciples in Q and that therefore illustrates the ethos of the fellowship of disciples.[3]

> Do not worry about your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Look at the ravens: they neither sow nor reap and they do not gather into barns—yet God feeds them. Are you not worth much more

> than they are? Who of you could add a short space of time to his life by worrying? Also concerning clothing—why do you worry yourselves? Behold the lilies, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. But I say to you: not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these. But if God already thus clothes the grass that is in the field today and thrown into the fire tomorrow—how much more you, you of little faith! Therefore, do not worry and ask: what shall we wear? The Gentiles seek all these things. But your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek his reign, then these things will be added to you. (Q 12.22-31)

Here, we are not dealing with a general exhortation not to be concerned any longer about one's livelihood. Rather, the group of itinerant Jesus followers who were actually no longer in position to pursue their occupations due to their new way of life is in view. Instead of this, they were directed to hand over to God the care for their daily needs. Concretely, this meant, of course, that the people in the places where the itinerant missionaries appeared had to care for their support. Precisely this can be recognized in the mission discourse when it speaks of their reception and provision in houses. From this developed the primitive Christian missionaries' right to support, which Paul also knows and which is still reflected in the *Didache* at the beginning of the second century CE (*Didache* 11–13).[4] The origins of this praxis can be seen in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, which included unconditional dedication to the establishment of this kingdom.

The command to love one's enemies was presumably also originally directed to the fellowship of disciples. This may at first be surprising since a general characteristic of Jesus' ethos is often seen in this command. But this becomes clear when one views more closely the context in which this instruction is handed down.[5]

The command to love one's enemies is a component of the speech from Q that lies behind the Sermon on the Plain in Luke (Luke 6.20-49) and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (Matt 5–7). The texts read as follows:

| *Matt 5.38–48* | *Luke 6.27–36* |
|---|---|
| You have heard that it was said: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you: do not resist evil but when someone strikes your right cheek, turn the other to him also. And the one who wishes to go to court with you in order to take your undergarment, let him also have your coat. And when someone wants to force you to go one mile, then go with him two. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn away the one who wishes to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said: you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For when you love those who love you, then what reward will you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you only greet your brothers, what do you do that is special? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, you should be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. | But I say to you who hear: love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; bless those who mistreat you. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from the one who takes your coat, do not refuse also the undergarment. Give to everyone who asks of you; and from the one who takes your things do not demand them back. And as you wish that people should do to you, so do to them also! And if you love those who love you, what credit do you have from this? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit do you have from this? Even the sinners do the same. And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to receive it back, what credit do you have from this? Even the sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same. Rather, love your enemies; do good and lend where you do not hope to receive anything in return. Thus your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High. For he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful as also your Father is merciful. |

The comparison shows that in both texts the command to love one's enemies stands in close connection with the renunciation of retaliation in relation to wrongs suffered. Matthew has divided the two into two so-called "antitheses"; in Luke the command to love one's enemies frames the command to forgo retaliation (vv. 27 and 35). Moreover, in Luke the so-called "golden rule" stands in the middle of the composition (v. 31).

A tradition in which love of enemies and renunciation of retaliation were already joined with each other evidently lies behind the two texts. We can no longer say whether this joining goes back to Jesus or was made in Q. It is, however, clear that the command to love one's enemies was interpreted at a very early stage by the demand for the renunciation of retaliation.

What does it mean then to love the enemy? One may not take this virtually shocking demand too easily. The enemy is not simply an unsympathetic person whose roughness one overlooks, but a person who strives for one's possessions and perhaps even for one's life and who uses his power to degrade others. His behavior should not simply be forgiven. The exhortation to love one's enemy goes far beyond this. Violence suffered should not simply be accepted without resistance. Rather, the demand to forgo retaliation is understood as an active behavior: the other cheek should be presented; the coat should also be given in addition; a second mile should be walked with the enemy. Thus, the point lies in the *voluntary doubling of the suffered wrong*, which clearly goes beyond the renunciation of retaliation.

One can characterize this ethos as "fundamental one-sidedness."[6] Actions are being described that draw their provocation from the anticipation of the order of the reign of God. By inviting one to the voluntary increase of wrong suffered, they place before one's eyes the order of violence and counterviolence that stands against the reign of God and simultaneously break through it symbolically. Thus, it is not simply a matter of renunciation of retaliation but of "paradoxical interventions,"[7] which make clear the absurdity of violence and oppression through intensification. Through this the order of the reign of God should be lived out before the enemy, and he or she should be moved to accept this order. Love of enemies thus consists in confronting the enemy with the order of the reign of God that is also salvific for him or her. That we are dealing here with a radical ethos is obvious. It is no accident that these demands therefore also end with the exhortation to orient oneself toward the mercy (Luke) or even the perfection (Matthew) of God himself.

If the command to love one's enemies is thus to be interpreted in close connection to the symbolic renunciation of retaliation, then it can best be placed in the ethos of Jesus' fellowship of followers, which was characterized by such symbolic actions. It could reflect and respond to the experiences of hostility in the mission, which were mentioned in the mission discourse. At a later time the love of enemies then even came to be the distinguishing feature of the Christian ethos and was of great relevance due to the hostilities and persecutions in the first three centuries.

Finally, the order of the reign of God that was to be symbolically realized in the fellowship of Jesus included the annulment of the relations between rulers and ruled:

> You know that those who are regarded as rulers over the nations oppress them and that their great ones use violence against them. But it is not so among you! But whoever wants to be great among you shall be your servant. And whoever wants to be first shall be the slave of all. (Mark 10.42-44)

That we are dealing here with a tradition that is aimed at direct followers in the first instance can already be inferred from the context. The concern is with an instruction that Jesus gives his disciples in an internal discussion and not with a teaching directed to the people. Thus, a distinct model is set forth here for the disciples. Hierarchy, oppression, and the use of violence should not exist among them. Rather, the usual form of exercising power is turned into its opposite by the paradoxical reversal of ruling and serving: true greatness distinguishes itself through service, and ruling in the sense of the reign of God through the readiness to renounce honor and a high status. The model on which the disciples are to orient themselves is Jesus' own activity, as becomes clear immediately after the quoted passage in Mark 10.45: "For also the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This saying presumably does not go back to Jesus himself in the form that is quoted but is an interpretation of his coming from a post-Easter perspective. The motif of service is, however, firmly anchored in the Jesus tradition. It is also encountered in Luke 12.37 and 22.27, and in John 13 it is illustrated through the narrative of the foot washing: by washing his disciples' feet, thus by carrying out the service of a slave, Jesus gives them a model for their behavior among one another.

Thus, with the help of these examples, the ethos of a group that symbolically practices the order of the reign of God proclaimed by it comes into view. At some points—in the case of the love of enemies and the reversal of ruling and serving—this ethos is more transparent in relation to their validity as generally applicable rules than with the demands to separate from house and family and not to worry about one's daily needs. This shows that there are certainly material

connections between the two orientations of the ethos of Jesus, even if from a sociological perspective one must distinguish between the paradigmatic ethos of the disciples of Jesus and the ethos for all Israel.

## The Ethos of the "Family of Jesus"

Jesus designated those who do the will of God as his "family" (Mark 3.31-35). To do the will of God means concretely to let the love and forgiveness that becomes visible in Jesus' turning to human beings become the foundation of one's own fellowship. According to the self-understanding of Jesus, God turns to his people in Jesus' own mission with all his mercy and grace.[8] He receives the sinner who is prepared for repentance (cf. Luke 15.11-32: the parable of the prodigal son); he does not bind himself in his goodness to human standards but turns also to those who appear to have little claim to it (Matt 20.1-16: the parable of the workers in the vineyard). Jesus therefore summons one to turn confidently to God and even to badger him in prayer (Luke 18.1-8: the parable of the widow who badgers the judge to give her justice) and to trust in the hearing of one's petitions: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and for the one who knocks it will be opened" (Q 11.9-10).

Therefore, the family of Jesus, which is oriented toward this experience of God, also includes sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes.[9] This is illustrated by the paradigmatic meals that Jesus celebrates: in them it becomes visible how God welcomes sinners; they thus point simultaneously to the form of the community that gathers in the name of Jesus. Therefore, it can even be said that Jesus himself possesses the authority to forgive sins that is actually reserved for God and that he mediates this authority to human beings.[10]

Therefore, the ethos of the community also includes the readiness to forgive one another as a consequence of the experienced forgiveness of God. Matthew makes this clear in a tradition that is cited after the Lord's Prayer: "If you forgive human beings their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive, your heavenly Father also will not forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6.14-15).

Here the forgiveness of human beings among one another is placed in direct relation to the forgiveness received from God; indeed the latter is even made dependent upon the former. Matthew thereby takes up the petition for forgiveness from the Lord's Prayer ("forgive us our debts") and connects it with the ethic of the community: the forgiveness of God must be directly reflected in the fellowship of Jesus. This direct relationship becomes visible in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt 18.23-35). The servant who has a great debt remitted by a king shows himself to be unmerciful immediately afterward toward one who owes a much smaller sum and has him thrown in prison. As a result he himself is also arrested and tortured by the king, who hears of this. As with the petition for forgiveness from the Lord's Prayer and its following interpretation, divine and human forgiveness are also directly connected with each other here.

What Matthew formulates as an ethic for the community has its foundation in Jesus' instruction to align the communal life in a thoroughgoing manner with the experienced nearness and forgiveness of God.

A certain stance toward possessions also belongs to the ethos of the community. In correspondence with the radical renunciation of possessions in the fellowship of disciples, Jesus warns his addressees against hanging their hearts on earthy possessions: "No one can serve two lords. For he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Q 16.13).

In the attachment to earthly possessions, Jesus thus sees a serious danger for the orientation of the human being to the will of God. This can even lead to one thereby placing his salvation at risk. "What does it benefit a human being if he gains the whole world and yet receives harm to his life? For what can a human being give as an equivalent for his life?" (Mark 8.36-37).

In the style of sapiential argumentation the two rhetorical questions pose the question of the benefit of an orientation to the "world." With "life" is meant the kind of life that endures before the judgment of God. The orientation to the earthly is precisely what can obstruct this perspective on life. It simultaneously becomes clear that the human being has nothing to offer that could be viewed as equivalent to a successful life.

In various texts there are explicit warnings against the danger of riches: while the rich man who encounters Jesus is prepared to keep the commands of God, he does not want to have to give away his possessions. Jesus comments on this with the sentences "How difficult it is for those who have possessions to enter into the kingdom of God. . . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10.23, 25).

The warnings to the rich not to lose themselves to their possessions correspond to this warning. This theme especially comes to expression in Luke, whose circle of addressees evidently included people who were well-off. Here, pronouncements of woes over those who are rich, sated, and laughing are juxtaposed with the beatitudes over those who are poor, hungry, and mourning (Luke 6.24-26). The underlying logic is that one receives a reward only once—either in the earthly life or with God. The rich have already received what is due to them; therefore they have nothing more to expect when the concern is with the distribution of heavenly reward.

The parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31) illustrates this: the poor man is carried to Abraham's bosom after his death, whereas the rich man suffers torturous pains in the underworld. He is told that he already received his share of good in the earthly life, whereas Lazarus receives it from God after his death.

In their present form these traditions certainly go back to Luke and not to Jesus. Nevertheless, they reveal an important facet of the ethos of Jesus: one's dealings with earthly possessions should be oriented to gathering not perishable earthly riches for oneself but imperishable riches with God. This alone is an intelligent dealing with possessions because it is oriented to the true riches and the true life with God.

> Do not gather for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy them and where thieves break in and steal. But gather for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy them and where thieves neither break in nor steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt 6.19-21 par Luke 12.33-34)

This is illustrated by the scandalous parable of the unrighteous steward (Luke 16.1-8): when he is dismissed by his lord because he had

squandered his possessions, he reduces the certificates of indebtedness of the debtors of his lord so that they will receive him into their homes after his dismissal. The behavior of this steward—though unrighteous—is explicitly praised by Jesus as "intelligent." The intelligence resides in the dedication and cleverness of the steward, who in view of threatening dismissal deals with possessions in such a way that he has a benefit from them. In this respect, so we read, the "children of the world" are often more shrewd than the "children of light." Thus, it is not the immoral manner of acting that is exemplary but the cleverness in dealing with money and possessions in view of the imminent judgment—in the parable: the imminent dismissal. If the "children of the light" were just as clever, then they would use their possessions to secure for themselves a treasure in heaven—precisely by not hanging their hearts on it but by being generous in giving alms.

Finally, another sphere of the ethos directed to all Israel is the stance toward the authority of the state. This will be addressed with reference to the well-known answer of Jesus to the question of whether one should pay taxes (Mark 12.13-17). Jesus initially answers with the counter question of whose image can be seen on the coin and reacts to the answer ("Caesar's") with the sentence "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

In the treatment of the Galilean context of Jesus we established that Antipas did not have any coins minted with the image of Caesar or with his own portrait. Therefore, the episode also takes place not in Galilee but in Jerusalem. In the case of the coin with the image of the Emperor Tiberius we are dealing with a coin that was in use in Judea, which was subject to a Roman prefect. With regard to the question of paying taxes, the answer of Jesus is not very spectacular: he brushes aside the provocation hidden in the question, namely to convict Jesus of rebellion against Roman rule, with the terse reference to the image on the coin: the taxes are levied by earthly rulers and thus they are also paid to them. Jesus does not see his task in a politically active rebellion against Roman rule. We already established an analogous finding with respect to his relation to his Galilean territorial lord Antipas.

The point, however, lies in the addition that goes beyond the content of the question, namely to give to God what is God's. With this statement the power of the emperor is clearly relativized. For by the words "what is God's" is naturally meant the worship of the one who

has power over heaven and earth and the one to whom all earthly powers are therefore also subject. Through the immediately added reference to the worship that is due to God alone, a clear limit is thus placed on the authority of the emperor. From this it also naturally follows that at the moment in which the emperor encroaches on the sphere of God one no longer owes him obedience. Jesus did not operate as an active resistance fighter, such as, for example, the Maccabees or the Zealots later. He did, however, make clear that the obedience that was to be given to the political rulers found its limit at the worship belonging to God alone. This became relevant for the early Christians at the latest when they were to be forced to participate in the religious worship of the emperor in the context of the imperial cult—and this they often consistently refused, and they suffered martyrdom in return. But this also always becomes relevant when the power of the state oversteps its function of upholding public order and intervenes in spheres that are not its to regulate, namely where it is a matter of convictions of value that are beyond political control.

Thus, the ethos of the "family of Jesus" can be understood in analogy to that of his fellowship of disciples: the unlimited readiness to forgive is analogous to the love of enemies; the merciful and responsible dealing with earthly goods is analogous to the radical renunciation of possessions; the orientation to the reign of God is analogous to the forsaking of house and family; the orientation toward the reign of God that sets limits on that of earthly rulers is analogous to the reversal of ruling and serving.

## Jesus and the Jewish Law

### The authority of Jesus and the law

Jesus' stance toward the Jewish law is a topic that has been much discussed in scholarship. The represented positions move between the poles of a break of Jesus with Jewish law piety on the one side and his having a stance that completely remained within the framework of the early Jewish understanding of the law on the other side. In what follows it will be shown that Jesus in no way fundamentally called into question the validity of the Jewish law, but interpreted it in the

framework of his conviction of the dawning reign of God. The law was for Jesus, as for Judaism in general, an expression of the holy will of God. Therefore, it can be excluded from the outset that he fundamentally called its validity into doubt, especially since he did not put forth any fundamental reflections about the role of the law in God's plan of salvation in the manner of Paul, but commented on its interpretation in concrete situations. The alternative of "fulfillment of the law or abolition of the law," which is occasionally put forward, therefore falls short of the mark. Instead, the question that arose for Jesus was how the regulations of the law presented themselves in the light of the reign of God.

An aspect that must be especially taken into account for this topic is the fact that the validity of the Jewish law was especially controversial for the early Christian communities because there was a special need for legitimation at this point in view of the separation from Judaism and the acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian congregations. This also had an effect on the presentation of Jesus' relationship to the law. One must therefore ask how the view of the Gospels relates to the impulses that went forth from Jesus himself.

The double love command can serve as a starting point. This commandment, which is attested in varying versions and contexts in the synoptic tradition, says at its core that God must be loved in the first place but that love for one's neighbor comes alongside it as a second command that is equal in rank. We are dealing with a combination of two Scripture quotations: Deut 6.5 (love of God) and Lev 19.18 (love of neighbor). The summary of the law in one commandment that simultaneously provides the standard with which the law is to be interpreted is frequently attested in Judaism. Even if the combination of the aforementioned two Scriptures is not explicitly attested elsewhere, it is nevertheless clear that love of God and love of neighbor were understood as leading principles of the law.[11]

A second aspect of Jesus' interaction with the law comes to expression in the so-called "antitheses" of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5.17-48). These already play a central role in the discussion around Jesus' understanding of the law because the pointed opposition of law regulation ("it is said . . .") and instruction of Jesus ("But I say to you") leads directly to the question of which authority Jesus grants to the law. This is intensified further by the fact that in some of the

antitheses the concern seems to be more with a radical interpretation of the demand of the law (e.g.: "it is said: you shall not kill.—But I say to you: the one who becomes angry with his brother is subject to judgment!"), whereas in others the concern seems to be with its abrogation ("It is said: You shall not swear a false oath.—But I say to you: you shall not swear at all!").

The fundamental way in which the stance of Jesus toward the law is brought into the form of antithetical oppositions certainly goes back to Matthew in its present form, even though it is completely possible that Jesus himself also formulated such antitheses. In the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount attention must also be given to the fact that Matthew frames them with guiding principles for their interpretation:

1. Introduction to the antitheses:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and prophets. I have not come to abolish but to fulfill. For amen I say to you: until heaven and earth pass away not a single iota or stroke will pass from the law until everything is accomplished. Therefore, whoever dissolves one of these smallest commandments and thus teaches people will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you: if your righteousness does not go far beyond that of the Pharisees and scribes, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5.17-20)

2. Antitheses:

> It is said (in the law) . . .—But I say to you. . . . (Matt 5.21-47)

3. Conclusion of the antitheses:

> Therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5.48)

Through this arrangement Matthew makes clear that he intends the antitheses to be understood as Jesus' interpretation of the law, which is oriented to the standard of the perfection of God. The division that is sometimes made into antitheses that intensify the law and antitheses that annul it therefore misses their point. The common intention of the antitheses consists in driving home the necessity,

in view of the nearness of God, of the orientation to his will that comes to expression in the law, which may not be moderated, let alone turned into its opposite. The concern is thus with the intention that stands behind the law and that provides the criterion for the evaluation of the individual norms: the will of God for a peaceful, reconciled togetherness of human beings actually stands behind the prohibition of killing; the togetherness of man and woman grounded in the order of creation basically stands behind the prohibition of divorce;[12] finally the demand for honest and truthful speech stands behind the prohibition of oaths. With this an important aspect of Jesus' understanding of the law is grasped.

## Jesus and the Sabbath

Jesus' stance toward the Sabbath, which is frequently thematized in the Gospels, can also be placed in this horizon. The controversies always revolve around the limits of what is allowed on the Sabbath. On this point more strict and more liberal positions were represented in Judaism. The position of Jesus will be reconstructed starting from the two Sabbath episodes of the Gospel of Mark that are directly adjacent to each other. In these two narratives Mark treats the Sabbath question in a summary manner within a complex of controversy dialogues. This topic does not appear in Mark after that. Moreover, the whole complex ends with a resolution to kill Jesus (Mark 3.6). This shows that Mark sees one of the reasons that led to Jesus' condemnation and execution in Jesus' stance toward the Sabbath. We will need to inquire below whether or not this is historically accurate.

In Mark 2.23-28 the Pharisees criticize the fact that Jesus' disciples pluck heads of grain in a grain field on the Sabbath, apparently to assuage their hunger. In defense Jesus refers to David, who went with his companions into the house of God and ate the consecrated bread that was reserved for the priests (1 Sam 21.2-7). It is not said, however, that this took place on a Sabbath. Rather, the argument is that in a situation of hunger David also disregarded a commandment pertaining to food, which pertained, however, to the food and not to the time. From this it is deduced that Jesus and his disciples may also behave in a corresponding manner. Thus, the episode argues from the

authority of David, which authorizes him to transgress a food commandment. The implicit conclusion runs as follows: what David was entitled to, this can be claimed by Jesus for himself.

The two concluding sentences take this up: "And he said to them: the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even over the Sabbath" (Mark 2.27-28; only the second sentence is found in Matthew and Luke).

The first sentence places human beings and the Sabbath in a relationship with each other. An analogy to this is found in the saying of Rabbi Simeon ben Menasya (ca. 180 CE), in which he interprets the Sabbath command from Exod 31.14: "The Sabbath is given over to you but you are not given over to the Sabbath." Irrespective of whether the statement from Mark 2.27 or a similar saying can be presupposed for Jesus himself, one can recognize in it a position that corresponds to his view of the law, which has already been set forth above: Jesus questions the regulations of the law with a view to their intention. With regard to the Sabbath, this means that its meaning cannot be directed against human beings but rather should be to their benefit. A small but decisive difference between the rabbinic statement and that of the Gospel of Mark consists in the fact that the "giving over" formulation certainly alludes to the giving over of the law to Israel on Sinai, whereas the "createdness" of the Sabbath alludes to the creation. With this the statement of Jesus has a more fundamental character than that of the Rabbi, for the appeal to the order of creation anchors the Sabbath in the order of God for the world and thereby goes beyond the appeal to the giving of the law on Sinai. Nevertheless, the maxim of Jesus in no way abandons the Jewish view of the Sabbath.

With this, however, the interpretation of the episode is not yet complete. Two points stand out: First, in the described situation it is not a matter of a life-threatening emergency that would have legitimated the transgression of the Sabbath command in the sense of the justification produced by Jesus ("The Sabbath was created for humankind"), but it is simply a matter of hunger. Therefore, the reference of Jesus to the meaning of the Sabbath does not represent a convincing legitimation of the behavior of the disciples. Second, the reference to David, who likewise disregarded a food commandment when he became hungry, would by no means have been accepted as an argument in Jewish Sabbath discussions—already because David did not

even transgress the Sabbath commandment. The example is also only partly applicable because Jesus himself—unlike David—did not even take part in the eating that was in question. Thus, the reference to David apparently serves not to ground a certain interpretation of the Sabbath but to legitimate the authority of Jesus in principle. This leads to the second of the sentences that conclude the episode. Taking up the reference to David, this sentence appeals to the authority of the Son of Man Jesus as the "Lord" of the Sabbath. Here, a similar perspective comes to expression as in the antitheses: Jesus has the authority to interpret the law in such a way that its actual intention becomes visible therein.[13]

Thus, in Mark 2.23-28 we are dealing with a narrative that is formulated from a later perspective. It is oriented to the authority of Jesus, which corresponds to David and entails sovereignty in relation to the law—concretely: in relation to the Sabbath command. Along this line lie then the positions that viewed the observance of the Sabbath as no longer mandatory for Christian communities, which also included former Gentiles.[14] This, however, already goes beyond the episode in the Gospel of Mark. Here, the Sabbath is viewed as established by God, and what is at issue is the question of its proper understanding. The episode can thus be placed in the beginnings of a development that led from a stance toward the regulations of the Jewish law grounded in the sovereignty of Jesus to positions that no longer obligated communities comprising Jewish and Gentile Christians to keep the law—and thereby simultaneously placed them outside of Judaism.

The second episode more closely approaches the discussions that Jesus is likely to have actually had concerning the Sabbath. In Mark 3.1-6 the concern is with the question of healing on the Sabbath. Again, it is the Pharisees who criticize Jesus, this time because he heals the withered hand of a human being on the Sabbath. The question with which Jesus answers them runs as follows: "Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or evil, to save life or to kill?" With this sentence Mark intensifies the controversy between Jesus and his opponents: doing evil or good is not actually under discussion at all, no more than saving life is. Moreover, the concrete discussion about what is permitted and prohibited on the Sabbath is elevated to a general level: with the opposition of good and evil the framework of

Jewish Sabbath discussions is left in favor of a general ethical maxim; good must naturally always be done, not only on the Sabbath.

Nevertheless, the episode still allows the context of the Sabbath discussions to be recognized. The question of what is permitted on the Sabbath points to this in the first instance. That Jesus participated in such discussions is confirmed by other traditions. In the parallel episode in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus expresses himself somewhat differently:

> Who among you, if he possesses only one single sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, would not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a human being than a sheep! Therefore, it is permitted on the Sabbath to do good. (Matt 12.11-12)

The argument here is clearly more differentiated. Jesus legitimizes his action by appealing to the Sabbath rule, which is presupposed as valid, that animals that have had an accident may be helped in special cases—here it is the only animal of its owner. Jesus argues in a similar way in Luke 13.10-17 and 14.1-5. Here too he legitimates the healing of a human being on the Sabbath with reference to the fact that animals would be given water or a son or animal that had met with an accident would be helped. In each case the conclusion is drawn from this that human beings are thus to be helped all the more. This view was not uncontested in Judaism. In the *Damascus Document*, of which a manuscript was discovered in the Cairo Geniza (treasure room) in 1896–1897 and of which copies were also found in Qumran, a more radical view is represented: on the Sabbath animals may not be helped when giving birth, nor may they be rescued from cisterns or pits. By contrast, no tool (ladder or rope) may be used to save human beings who have had an accident.[15]

Thus, Jesus did not fundamentally call into question the validity of the Sabbath. Otherwise the discussions about the Sabbath's sphere of validity could not be explained. Instead his stance is characterized by the fact that he advocated a rather broad interpretation of the Sabbath command in concrete situations. If one makes Mark 2.27 (the Sabbath was created for humankind) the foundation—whereby it can remain open whether the formulation originates with Jesus—then it is shown that Jesus viewed the turning of the love of God to human

beings as the standard for the interpretation of the Sabbath. The early Christian communities emphasized the authority of Jesus beyond this and fit the Sabbath observance into the coordinate system of a general ethic (do what is good).

## Jesus and the purity laws

We already encountered the issue of purity in connection with the constitution of the fellowship of Jesus.[16] Here, I will return to this question under the aspect of its significance for Jesus' stance toward the law.

In the case of the purity command we are dealing with an especially fundamental issue. It is true that this changed in the moment at which the Christian communities were composed for the most part of former Gentiles. But at the time of Jesus, when there were not yet "Christian" communities but, alongside the direct followers that traveled with him, sympathizers of Jesus who naturally continued to live in their Jewish environment, the question of purity was extremely relevant. This is shown not least in the fact that it played a central role in the opening up of the Christian mission to the Gentiles from a movement that was originally directed to Israel: in the community of Antioch, where the model of the living together of Gentiles and Jews in a Christian community was tried out for the first time, the question of the common eating was a central point of controversy among the *Jewish* members because for this they had to transgress the boundary between clean and unclean.[17] Acts will then ground this step with the claim that God has also declared unclean food to be clean (Acts 10.15).

The particularly explosive nature of the purity question can be explained sociologically: how the Sabbath was to be interpreted in concrete situations or how the biblical command not to kill or the regulation of divorce were to be understood were questions that touched neither the sphere of the validity of the law nor the difference between Israel and the Gentiles. This was different with the purity command insofar as with it the boundaries between clean and unclean within Israel were in question, which could then even be extended to the boundaries between Israel and the Gentiles.[18]

As explained above, Jesus took a position in relation to the purity command that was above all oriented to the integration of those who were excluded as unclean within Israel but could also lead to sporadic openness in relation to Gentiles. In the process a maxim such as the one in Mark 7.15/Matt 15.11—though presumably not in the wording encountered there—could stand in the background: external things—unclean food, contact with unclean human beings, touching unclean objects, walking on unclean ground—could not as a matter of principle make one unclean.[19] In the episode that includes the saying, Jesus criticizes the Pharisaic view of purity in a similar manner as their position on divorce: with their adherence to the "traditions of human beings" they are said to make invalid the word of God—thus the actual sense of the command. This lies, as the distinction between outside and inside makes clear (nothing outside the human being can make him unclean, only what is in him), in a life that is oriented to the will of God—that which "comes out" of the human being, thus what gives information about his inside. That purity laws can therefore be transgressed is nowhere found in the Jesus tradition, though the exhortation not to interpret purity as something that excludes does occur.

Finally, the fact that Jesus stood in opposition to the Pharisees with his view of purity comes to expression also in the accusation that they merely observe the purity regulations in an external manner: "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but your inside is full of greed and evil" (Luke 11.39; cf. Matt 23.25).

Similarly as in Mark 7.15, here too the difference between inside and outside is stressed—with a polemically intensified picture, for naturally no one cleans only the outside of dishes. It is clear from the two passages that the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees is concerned with the preservation of purity over against an external sphere that is regarded as an unclean external sphere—it must therefore not be "merely external" purity!—and a purity that is open to the outside. This can be placed in Jesus' understanding of the law in such a way that here too a stance toward the law that is shaped by the conviction of the dawning reign of God, and a nearness of God bound up with it, comes to expression.

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# 11

# Representative of God or Savior of Israel?

## *The Self-Understanding of Jesus and the Judgment of His Contemporaries*

In previous chapters we have already suggested at multiple points that Jesus appeared with a special claim, namely that through his activity God was establishing his reign on the earth. This self-understanding of Jesus has provided a substantial impulse for the emergence of faith in him as the decisive, exclusive representative of God. This comes to expression not least in the designations of majesty that were applied to Jesus. Important aspects of the activity of Jesus coalesce in these designations, for which reason what has been presented thus far can be developed further through a consideration of them and sharpened with a view to chapter 12, in which we will deal with the reasons for the condemnation and execution of Jesus. In what follows we will examine more closely the claim of Jesus with the help of two of these designations, which play a central role in the Jesus tradition, namely Son of Man and Christ. It will become clear that in these expressions two perspectives are expressed that are bound up in a central manner with the activity of the earthly Jesus. By contrast, "Son of God" and "Lord" were first drawn upon for the interpretation of the activity and fate of Jesus in the post-Easter confession tradition. Therefore, they will be treated at a later point, namely in the "Exaltation to God: Jesus as Lord" section in chapter 13. We begin with those designations that lead us nearest to the earthly Jesus.

## Jesus, the Son of Man

### Overview of the Son of Man sayings

The expression "Son of Man" is found—unlike, for example, "Christ" or "Son of God"—exclusively in the Gospels (and once in Acts), whereas it is absent from the epistolary literature. Another distinctive feature is that "Son of Man" is consistently used as a self-designation of Jesus, whereas others never refer to or address Jesus as the Son of Man.[1] Third, the linguistic formulation is conspicuous. The expression is always used with the double article; thus, it would be literally translated "*the* Son of *the* Man."

There has been a long controversy in scholarship about whether we are dealing here with a speech convention of Jesus and if so whether Jesus designated himself or a different, future figure with it. In the process, the Son of Man sayings have usually been divided into sayings about the earthly active Son of Man; the suffering, dying, and rising Son of Man; and the future coming Son of Man. By contrast, in what follows we start from two traditions that are characterized by a close connection between confession of the Son of Man and eschatological salvation, since in this way the profile of Jesus' speech about the Son of Man best becomes visible.

> Everyone who confesses me before human beings, the Son of Man will also confess him before the angels of God. But the one who denies me before human beings will be denied before the angels of God. (Q 12.8-9)

> For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels. (Mark 8.38)

The appearance of the saying in Mark and Q shows first that we are dealing with a very early tradition. The confession of Jesus is directly connected with one's fate in the end-time judgment. This is already shown in the fact that the initial sentences are formulated in the present and the following sentences in the future. Another characteristic feature is that an I sentence of Jesus related to the present and a

statement about the Son of Man related to the judgment are always juxtaposed (the passive formulation in the second part of the Q saying is probably to be understood in correspondence to the first). This phenomenon can be understood in two ways: with the Son of Man Jesus means either a heavenly figure that is different from himself or he means himself in both cases. In the first instance, he would place himself in close connection to this Son of Man, as his earthly counterpart, so to speak, for the Son of Man would behave in correspondence to how one previously behaved in relation to Jesus. If, however, the second option were correct,[2] then with this saying in its present form we would presumably not be dealing with an authentic saying of Jesus. That Jesus ascribed a role for himself in the end-time judgment is improbable and more likely goes back to a post-Easter development.

The saying reveals two characteristic aspects of the activity of Jesus: it shows that Jesus interpreted his own activity in close connection with the judgment of God, through which this activity will be completed. Moreover, it brings to expression the close connection between the confession of Jesus and the end-time deliverance. This also has a basis in the activity of Jesus. Thus, in the double tradition from Mark and Q quoted above we are dealing with an early interpretation of the activity of Jesus with the help of a Son of Man saying. Whether "Son of Man" was a self-designation of Jesus—as it is undoubtedly intended in the Gospels—cannot, by contrast, be determined on the basis of this saying alone.

The second saying to be mentioned here brings another characteristic feature to expression.

> Blessed are you when human beings revile and persecute you and say all evil against you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great. For in the same way they also persecuted the prophets before you. (Q 6.22-23)

With this saying we are probably dealing with a later addition to the first three beatitudes. It differs from them in the fact that it no longer deals with a promise of the reign of God but with a stance toward the Son of Man. As the comparison with the fate of the prophets shows, an inner-Jewish situation is presupposed: Israel persecuted its prophets as it now persecutes the followers of Jesus. Thus, the saying

comes from a time in which the Jesus movement still moved completely within Judaism. As in the previously cited passage, here too there is a connection between confessing the Son of Man and the final judgment. In the process, persecution for the sake of the Son of Man and heavenly reward are set over against each other. This saying thus reflects the situation of the followers of Jesus who were persecuted by their kinsfolk and interprets this situation in the horizon of the history of Israel. This could point to the post-Easter period, but it is also completely conceivable in the time of Jesus himself. During his earthly activity Jesus and his followers had to confront hostility and persecution from the side of their Jewish kinsfolk. Therefore, nothing speaks against the possibility that Jesus spoke a saying such as the one cited to his followers as an encouragement in this situation. It is clear that Jesus is identified here with the Son of Man: his followers are persecuted for his sake and not because of a confession of a "Son of Man" who differed from him. Thus, if this saying goes back to Jesus and contained the Son of Man expression in its original version, then Jesus used this expression here as a self-designation.[3]

Irrespective of the question of whether the two traditions in the above-cited versions come from Jesus, important aspects come to expression in them: the use of the designation "Son of Man" was apparently characteristic for Jesus and occurs in statements that formulate decisive aspects of his self-understanding. These include the demand for a close bond with him that can also lead to persecutions, as well as the connection between confession and salvation in the last judgment. Moreover, the expression was already understood as a central self-designation of Jesus in the oldest Jesus tradition. This could provide an indication that it was used by Jesus himself. We will return to this point below.

Starting from here, we may look briefly at the remaining Son of Man sayings. These are characterized by the fact that they describe the entire way of Jesus. The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins (Mark 2.10); he is Lord over the Sabbath (Mark 2.28); he has no place to lay his head (Q 9.58), which refers, as shown further above, to the itinerant existence of Jesus; he is rejected by "this generation" as "a glutton and a drunkard" (Q 7.34); he has come to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10.45); the Son of Man is handed over by one of his disciples (Mark 14.21); he will suffer, die, and rise

again (Mark 8.31; 9.31; 10.33); he will come again at the end of time and is commissioned with the carrying out of the judgment (Q 11.30; 12.40; 17.24; Mark 13.24-27; 14.62; Acts 7.56).

Thus, all the essential statements about the way and activity of Jesus are connected with the Son of Man expression. On the one hand, these include statements that can be placed into the profile described in the last chapter: the statement about his homeless itinerant existence, statements about his rejection by his Jewish contemporaries, statements about the heavenly reward of his followers, and statements—which we will need to address below—about his impending handing over. But these also include statements that should more likely be understood as post-Easter developments: when in an allusion to Dan 7.13-14 the coming again of the Son of Man on the clouds with the holy angels is announced or when the function of Jesus in the end judgment is mentioned, then we are probably dealing with a later development of his speech about the Son of Man. These either further develop the Son of Man statements of the earthly Jesus after Easter or take up Jesus' speech about the heavenly Son of Man and identify Jesus himself with this figure. In order to determine more precisely the meaning of the expression and with this also the speech about the Son of Man that is to be assumed for Jesus, we will turn in the next section to its origin in the Jewish tradition.

## The meaning of "Son of Man" in Jesus' sayings

What is the unconventional talk of the "Son of Man" about? The meaning of the expression is disclosed through its origin from the Aramaic. That it has its roots here is shown by the previously mentioned construction with a double article, which is thoroughly uncommon in Greek. This construction can be understood only as a translation of the corresponding Aramaic expression. In the first instance this expression simply means "human being" and can be found both in statements about the nature of the human being as such and in statements about a certain human being who is not specified more precisely. The use of "Son of Man" instead of "I" is not completely excluded, though it is uncommon.

A second root of the background of the Son of Man expression is its appearance in Dan 7.13-14.

> As I watched in the night vision, behold, there came one from the clouds of heaven in a form like a Son of Man. He came to the Ancient of Days and was led before him. He was given power and glory and kingly rule, so that all peoples, nations, and languages might serve him. His rule will be an everlasting rule, which will never pass away, and his kingdom will never pass away.

Thus, the conception here is that God transfers the final rule over the world to a being in human form who will bring an end to the rule of the preceding kingdoms—in the Daniel vision these are symbolized by the four previously mentioned animals. It is not quite clear who this "one in human form" from the Daniel vision is. The context appears to suggest an interpretation that identifies the figure with the people of Israel. On the other hand, the text is always related to an individual figure in the later receptions in *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*. In *1 Enoch* the Son of Man is a heavenly figure whom Enoch sees in a vision. He is also called "Messiah" and is identified at the end with Enoch himself. In *4 Ezra* the one in human form is also a figure that has always existed with God, who will exercise judgment at the end of time and destroy the Gentiles in the process. Thus, in the Jewish texts we find a number of contact points for the talk of the Son of Man as a figure that appears at the end of time who will take over a function in the judgment.

How can these findings be brought together with the findings from the Jesus tradition? A linguistic observation is conspicuous in the first instance: in the Greek texts of the book of Daniel the expression is always indefinite, "*one like a* Son of Man,"[4] whereas in the Gospels it is always "*the* Son of *the* Man." It is especially striking that the latter formulation has also found its way into passages that cite or allude to Dan 7.13-14. The Scripture passage was thus connected here with Jesus' speech convention.[5] Therefore, the Daniel vision cannot be the starting point of the primitive Christian Son of Man tradition, but rather it was drawn upon due to Jesus' manner of speech about "the Son of the Man" in order to develop it.

Next, it is characteristic that there is not a single Son of Man saying that makes a general statement about the human being *as such*. Rather, the concern is always with the features that are characteristic for Jesus and his way. If we also take into account the fact that the sayings about his coming again for judgment most likely represent a post-Easter further development and that a saying such as Mark 2.28 (the Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath) also describes Jesus' stance toward the Sabbath from a later perspective, as shown above, then the Son of Man sayings that can be traced back to Jesus are concentrated on sayings that depict his earthly way: his itinerant existence, his rejection and that of his followers, and his being handed over.

The Son of Man expression can then be placed into the profile of the activity of Jesus as follows: Jesus used this expression in such a way that with it the distinctive character of precisely *his* activity was stressed: when *he* did not possess a fixed place of residence, then this was significant because it belonged to the nature of the representative of God who must announce the message of the dawning reign of God to all Israel; when *he* was rejected by his contemporaries, then this was significant because with this the decision over salvation or rejection was made; when *he* was handed over to death, then this was a far-reaching event, because it involved the execution of the one with whom the coming of the reign of God was joined. Thus, Jesus used the expression "Son of Man" rather than merely saying "I" in order to point to the distinctiveness of his person: everything that took place through him and toward him was of singular significance because as the representative of God he established God's reign and confronted human beings with the decision over salvation and judgment. Thus, one can understand Jesus' use as an attention-attracting signal with which he pointed to the distinctiveness of his person.

On the basis of this usage, the Son of Man expression, which was not a "title of majesty" with a firmly outlined meaning in Jewish usage, could then also be developed after Easter and become a christological designation. Here, it was especially supplemented by two aspects: the prediction of the suffering, death, and resurrection and—with recourse to Dan 7.13-14—the prediction of his coming again for judgment.

The theses, which are sometimes considered in scholarship, that with the Son of Man Jesus meant a different figure than himself or

that we are dealing with a designation that was first transferred to Jesus after Easter are thus shown to be improbable. The findings can be more plausibly explained with the thesis that Jesus brought to expression the special significance of his activity by speaking of his person in a striking manner, namely through the use of the Son of Man expression. This provided the impulse for applying the expression "Son of Man" to all the important stations of his activity in the transmission and interpretation of the Jesus tradition. The meaning of the expression was soon no longer understood outside of the sphere of the Jesus tradition. Paul already no longer uses it because it would have remained incomprehensible to his addressees in the cities of the Roman Mediterranean world. In the second century it was then related to the human side of the nature of Jesus and set over against the designation "Son of God."[6]

## Is Jesus the Christ?

The designation of Jesus as "Christ" is already attested in the early period. It was used as a designation of function—analogous, for example, to the designation of John as "the Baptist." Very soon thereafter "Christ" could then be used as a name for Jesus. Paul already cites a confession in which it states that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15.3). Here, "Christ" is used without the article and as a name for Jesus. "Christ" is also soon used as a second name for Jesus in the often attested combination "Jesus Christ"—which is actually a confession. The original content of the expression often fades in the process. Finally, the quickly arising designation of Jesus' followers as "Christians" is derived from the Christ designation. The use of this expression as a name for Jesus, which was then also transferred to his followers, is also attested by the extra-Christian witnesses in Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius, which were discussed in the "Non-Christian Sources" section in chapter 3.

In the background of the expression stands the Hebrew or Aramaic "Messias," whose Greek translation is "Christos" (cf. John 1.41; 4.25), from which the Latin form "Christus" was then derived. The meaning "anointed" is derived from the ritual of the anointing of the king of Israel, and then later of the high priest when he was installed

into his office. The designation, however, also remained in use when the ritual no longer existed. It also designated the commissioning by God through which the corresponding persons were distinguished with holiness or nearness to God. For example, in this sense the prophet can say in Isa 61.1 that he has been "anointed" with the Spirit by God. In this passage, which is applied to Jesus in Luke 4.18, there is no longer a ritual of anointing that is actually performed in the background, but rather the prophet is described as one who is distinguished with a special task of God.

In early Judaism we find the expectation of the appearance of an anointed one in the context of the hopes for God's end-time act of salvation. Corresponding prophecies are already found in the prophetic books, where there is talk of a future ruler from the line of David who will come from Bethlehem and will rule over Israel (Isa 7.14-16; 9.1-6; 11.1-9; Mic 5.1-3). While it is true that the expression "anointed one" does not explicitly occur in these texts, one can nevertheless recognize the expectation of a Davidic ruler from whom the liberation of Israel from its enemies is expected. It has already been shown in a previous section that the expectation of such an anointed one of God could also be combined with the expectation of the establishment of God's reign.[7] This combination is of particular interest for the Jesus tradition.

The expectations of an end-time action of God in early Judaism were varied. Correspondingly, different notions of God's anointed are also found. In the Qumran writings the prophets could be called "anointed."[8] Alongside this usage is found the notion of the Davidic anointed one.[9] The interpretation of the Nathan prophecy from 2 Sam 7.11-14 in 4Q174 III also belongs here. Finally, the juxtaposition of a priestly and a kingly anointed one is a characteristic feature of the Qumran writings (1QS IX.11). It is also possible that the passages 1QSA II.11-22; CD XIV.18-19; XIX.10-11, which are not completely unambiguous, should be interpreted in this sense. At any rate, in these texts the leading role is given to the high priestly anointed one, in correspondence with the priestly constitution of the Qumran community.

For the Jesus tradition a passage from the previously mentioned Psalms of Solomon is especially important. It will therefore be cited at length.[10]

1. Lord, you are our king forevermore, for in you, O God, does our soul take pride.
2. How long is the time of a person's life on the earth? As is his time, so also is his hope in him.
3. But we hope in God our Savior, for the strength of our God is forever with mercy. And the kingdom of our God is forever over the nations in judgment.
4. Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel, and swore to him about his descendants forever, that his kingdom should not fail before you.
5. But (because of) our sins, sinners rose up against us, they set upon us and drove us out. Those to whom you did not (make the) promise, they took away (from us) by force; and they did not glorify your honorable name.
6. With pomp they set up a monarchy because of their arrogance; they despoiled the throne of David with arrogant shouting.
7. But you, O God, overthrew them, and uprooted their descendants from the earth, for there rose up against them a man alien to our race.
8. You rewarded them, O God, according to their sins; it happened to them according to their actions.

. . .

21. See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God.
22. Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction;
23. in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar;
24. To shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth;
25. At his warning the nations will flee from his presence; and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts.
26. He will gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness; and he will judge the tribes of the people that have been made holy by the Lord their God.

27. He will not tolerate unrighteousness (even) to pause among them, and any person who knows wickedness shall not live with them. For he shall know them that they are all children of their God.
28. He will distribute them upon the land according to their tribes; the alien and the foreigner will no longer live near them.
29. He will judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness.
    *Pause.*
30. And he will have gentile nations serving him under his yoke, and he will glorify the Lord in (a place) prominent (above) the whole earth. And he will purge Jerusalem (and make it) holy as it was even from the beginning,
31. (for) nations to come from the ends of the earth to see his glory, to bring as gifts her children who had been driven out, and to see the glory of the Lord with which God has glorified her.
32. And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God. There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.
33. (For) he will not rely on horse and rider and bow, nor will he collect gold and silver for war. Nor will he build up hope in a multitude for a day of war.
34. The Lord himself is his king, the hope of the one who has a strong hope in God. He shall be compassionate to all the nations (who) reverently (stand) before him.
35. He will strike the earth with the word of his mouth forever; he will bless the Lord's people with wisdom and happiness.
36. And he himself (will be) free from sin, (in order) to rule a great people. He will expose officials and drive out sinners by the strength of his word.
37. And he will not weaken in his days, (relying) upon his God, for God made him powerful in the holy spirit and wise in the counsel of understanding, with strength and righteousness.
38. And the blessing of the lord will be with him in strength, and he will not weaken;

39. His hope (will be) in the Lord. Then who will succeed against him,
40. mighty in his actions and strong in the fear of God? Faithfully and righteously shepherding the Lord's flock, he will not let any of them stumble in their pasture.
41. He will lead them all in holiness and there will be no arrogance among them, that any should be oppressed.
42. This is the beauty of the king of Israel which God knew, to raise him over the house of Israel to discipline it.
43. His words will be purer than the finest gold, the best. He will judge the peoples in the assemblies, the tribes of the sanctified. His words will be as the words of the holy ones, among sanctified peoples.
44. Blessed are those born in those days to see the good fortune of Israel which God will bring to pass in the assembly of the tribes.
45. May God dispatch his mercy to Israel; may he deliver us from the pollution of profane enemies;
46. The Lord Himself is our king forevermore.

The following aspects are significant for the designation of Jesus as the Anointed One (Christ): the text praises the everlasting kingdom of God, which had found its visible expression in the election of David to be king over Israel. In the meantime, however, sinners (the Romans are especially meant; but the desecration of Jerusalem and the temple through Antiochus IV Ephiphanes in 167 BCE was also remembered) had despoiled the throne of David and seized the rule for themselves. Therefore, God is now petitioned to send his king from the line of David, who will liberate it from the Gentile nations so that Israel is pure again and God can be worshipped again in Jerusalem. In verse 32 this Davidic king is called "the Anointed of the Lord." With the expression "Christ" ("anointed one") we are not dealing with a title but with the designation of a function, namely the function of the Davidic king (or also the high priest or a prophet) to lead and teach Israel in the name of God and to preserve his holiness and purity in the face of the surrounding Gentile nations.

How is the use of the Christ designation in the context of the activity of Jesus to be explained against this background? In contrast

to the expression "Son of Man," Jesus is always designated as "Christ" by others, whereas he never speaks of himself in this manner.[11] In the first place, this can first provide an indication that the activity of Jesus was interpreted by his contemporaries with the help of the designation "anointed." It is further characteristic that Jesus never rejects being designated as "the Anointed One," though he simultaneously makes clear that his activity is not adequately grasped with this designation. Here, three passages from the Gospel of Mark are striking in which Jesus specifies the application of the Christ designation to his person in a certain way.

In Mark 8.29 Peter formulates the confession "You are the Christ." Although we are almost certainly dealing here with a post-Easter confession that is placed in the mouth of Peter, it nevertheless expresses the fact that the activity of Jesus led his contemporaries to apply the Christ designation to him. In what follows Jesus interprets this confession anew by pointing to his suffering, death, resurrection, and coming again and connecting these with the self-designation "Son of Man"—and also indirectly with his designation as "Son" when it says that he will "come in the glory of his Father" (Mark 8.31, 38). Thus, the Christ confession is thereby placed within the broader horizon of the entire way of Jesus and understood from there.

In the second passage (Mark 12.35-37) Jesus criticizes the scribes' view that the Christ is the Son of David. To this end he refers to Psalm 110.1, where it says, "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." Since David was also a composer of psalms according to Jewish understanding, he is thus understood to speak here about his own Lord. He says concerning this Lord that he is the Anointed One who sits at the right hand of God. The argument in Mark 12.37 then runs: As this Lord, the Anointed One, cannot simultaneously be David's son; rather, he stands over him as his exalted Lord. Thus, the identity of the Anointed One with the Son of Man who sits at the right hand of God and will come from there is also presupposed here.

Finally, the third passage is that of the hearing of Jesus before the Jewish high court. Here, Jesus is asked by the high priest whether he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One. He answers, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14.62). Here too the Christ

designation is interpreted with the help of the Son of Man designation: Jesus is the Anointed One, but in such a way that as the Son of Man he will sit at the right hand of God and come again from there.

In these passages of the Gospel of Mark we are almost certainly dealing with a later view that connects the early Christian confession of Jesus as Christ with his activity and fate. However, a characteristic facet of the activity of the earthly Jesus can be recognized therein: the activity of Jesus evidently awakened expectations among his contemporaries that they had for the Anointed One of God. His talk of the dawning reign of God, his activity in regions that belonged to the promised land (especially his journey to Jerusalem), the gathering of a symbolic circle of twelve disciples, the high claim that he connected with his activity, and the following that he obtained among the people—all this led to his contemporaries hoping that he would establish again the kingly rule of David as the Anointed of God. This comes to striking expression in the narrative of the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem: the crowd greets him there with the words "Hosanna! Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed be the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11.9-10).

Thus, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was linked to the hope that God would now reestablish his kingdom in Israel and drive their enemies out of the land—in the sense in which it was described in the Psalms of Solomon.

The execution of Jesus also stands in connection to this: in Judea and Jerusalem the Romans always proceeded with severity against rebels who wanted to seize the rule for themselves. Due to expectations connected with his activity among the people, Jesus must have appeared to be such a rebel. Chapter 12 will deal more closely with the circumstances that led to his execution. At this point it can already be maintained that the expectations connected with the Christ designation played a role here. This is already indicated by the inscription on the cross "king of the Jews," because the reason for the execution was recorded on such an inscription. Jesus was thus executed as someone who claimed the kingly rule for himself—and as one through whom the Romans showed where such a claim leads by means of the cruel and degrading exhibition of him on the cross.

Finally, this explains why the Christ designation is already found in early statements about the death of Jesus: Christ died for our sins (1 Cor 15.3); Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5.6; cf. 5.8); we were baptized into the death of Christ (Rom 6.3); Christ is the crucified one (1 Cor 1.23; Gal 3.1); and so on. This shows that in primitive Christianity Jesus remained in memory as Christ above all as the *crucified* Christ.

Thus, the findings in relation to the Christ designation yield the following picture: Jesus presumably did not take up this designation himself. But he did not reject his being designated in this way either. However, he gave content to the designation in a distinct way: he fit it into his self-understanding as the representative of the dawning reign of God and modified it accordingly through the expression "Son of Man." In this way the expectation that he would rule over Israel as the Anointed One was changed into Jesus' own understanding of the kingly reign of God. When Jesus remained in the memory of primitive Christianity as the Christ who had died or been crucified, this shows that the designation was no longer oriented in a political sense toward the liberation of Israel from foreign rule but was understood in a sense determined by the activity of Jesus and therefore could also continue to be used in the face of his death.

## Summary

The designations "Son of Man" and "Christ" capture important features of the activity of Jesus. At the same time it becomes clear that these expressions represent neither "titles" that have a sharply defined meaning nor post-Easter categories that were applied to Jesus only after the fact. Rather, we are dealing with early Jewish designations for persons who were chosen by God and invested with a special task. Here, the concern could be with earthly human beings or superearthly beings. If the concern was with designations of function in early Judaism, then these expressions became "christological titles of majesty" in Christian usage.

Both expressions are already anchored in the earthly activity of Jesus—"Son of Man" as a self-designation of Jesus and "Christ" as a

designation with which his activity and fate were interpreted by his first followers. They bring to expression the claim with which Jesus acted in an especially concise way. The first expression shows an "insider perspective": Jesus understood his activity as one that mediated the nearness of God through the establishment of God's reign in a way that was not previously there. In order to express this distinctiveness he spoke of himself as the "Son of Man": a human being whose distinctiveness consisted in his God-given task. In the post-Easter reception of this designation it was expanded through its relation to Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and coming again, as well as through its relation to Dan 7.13-14. It was also changed in relation to its usage in early Judaism: according to the Christian understanding, "Son of Man" designates Jesus as the one who has already acted in the name of God, who was resurrected by God, and who will take over a function in the judgment when the reign of God is completed at the end of time.

The Christ designation places the activity of Jesus in the context of early Jewish expectations concerning the Anointed One. Therefore, the concern here is initially with an "outsider perspective": Jesus was confronted with the hope that he would carry out the political-military actions expected of the Davidic Anointed One, thus in the sense of a national-political Messiah. These expectations were also modified in light of the actual activity of Jesus—and naturally through his death. It is noteworthy that the expression "anointed" was not simply dropped in the process, but even became the second name of Jesus. The presupposition for this was the fact that it received a new interpretation from the perspective of Jesus' way: Jesus as the Christ—this meant understanding his activity in the horizon of his claim as "Son of Man," which also was not called into question by his death. It consequently meant also that this activity was not to be interpreted in the sense of traditional Jewish expectations concerning the Anointed One but to be understood in a more comprehensive manner as the turning of the mercy of God to human beings—especially to the poor, needy, and marginalized.

Thus, the use of the two early Jewish expressions shows how the activity of Jesus and the emergence of the Christian faith convictions are interconnected. In contrast to what is sometimes assumed in scholarship, the understanding of these two aspects cannot be divided

into a "pre-Easter," "non-messianic" activity of Jesus and a post-Easter emergence of faith in him. Rather, it becomes clear that impulses went forth from the activity and fate of Jesus that had a direct impact on the development of the early Christian faith. This relationship will be further investigated in chapter 13.

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# 12

# The Jerusalem Events

According to the Synoptic Gospels Jesus traveled to Jerusalem once during his public activity. If one follows the portrayal of the Gospel of John, then he was actually there multiple times to participate in the Jewish festivals. Both portrayals are shaped by their own respective motifs: in the Synoptics the Galilean phase and the Jerusalem phase are meant to be contrasted as clearly as possible with each other; the Gospel of John, in turn, portrays Jesus' encounter with the Jews as an escalating conflict whose highpoints are formed by the visits to Jerusalem. This becomes especially clear in the fact that Jesus' temple action is already narrated at the beginning, that is, during his first appearance in Jerusalem, and thus already stands in the background in what follows.

It is certain that Jesus appeared in Jerusalem at the end of his activity and was arrested and executed there. These events are surrounded by various interpretations that involve Jesus' way to Jerusalem, his stay there, the handing over by Judas, the hearing and crucifixion, but also the last meal with the disciples and naturally his death itself. The reports concerning these events are interspersed with Scripture citations that interpret the places and times of the events theologically. In this phenomenon it becomes clear that because the execution of Jesus amounted to a far-reaching event that fundamentally called his

claim into question, its meaning had to be grappled with intensively. Therefore, we encounter *theologically interpreted history* in an especially dense way in the tradition of the Passion events.

If history is always events appropriated through interpretation, then this is especially true for events that radically call previous convictions into question. In order to preserve these in their ambivalence and unwieldiness and to appropriate them productively at the same time, special interpretative efforts are necessary. We meet with such a process in the interpretation of the last phase of the activity of the earthly Jesus: early Christianity did not suppress the provocation that the founder and head of its movement was executed in a torturous manner for all to see—even if this brought them much ridicule and lack of understanding from their educated and less educated contemporaries. It did not conceal the embarrassment that of all people it was one of Jesus' most inner circle who handed him over—even if the symbolism of the circle of twelve created by Jesus himself received a serious blemish through this. Finally, it did not deny that his followers took to their heels in a shameful way at the very moment when it was most necessary for them to confess him and not leave him to his torturers alone—although at least some of these followers subsequently played leading roles in the communities. By facing the lowest point of its history rather than suppressing it or eliminating it through interpretation, early Christianity integrated an equally truthful and self-critical capability into its own history. Only on the basis of such an interaction with these events was it also possible to obtain a positive sense from the death of Jesus. Therein resides the special significance of the Passion events for the self-understanding of Christianity up to the present.

## The Activity in Jerusalem within the Framework of the Activity of Jesus

In a first step I will place the events around the arrest and execution of Jesus into the overall horizon of his activity. Jesus wanted to renew Israel, to confront it with God's invitation into his reign. For this purpose he initially appeared in Galilee and the surrounding regions in order to move the people there to repentance and acceptance of his

message. That he also wanted to proclaim his message of the nearness of God in Jerusalem, the religious and political center of Jerusalem, is self-evident. If his Galilean origin already suggested an orientation to Jerusalem, then the central role of Jerusalem within his program of the now dawning reign of God was clear. Not only did the words of the prophets and the psalms point to this place, but the temple was also there, as were the high priests and the Sanhedrin (in Luther's translation the "high council"), which was vested with limited power in the Roman period but was nevertheless the body that represented the highest religious authority for Judaism.

This is not to say that Jesus traveled to Jerusalem in an eye-catching procession in order to seek a decision between himself and the leaders of the Jewish people through a spectacular action in the temple.[1] Such an assumption already founders on the fact that the activity of Jesus provides no basis for the conscious bringing about of such a situation of decision. It is more likely that during a stay in Jerusalem for a Jewish festival Jesus came into conflicts that escalated and led to his arrest and condemnation.

This could speak more for the Johannine than for the Synoptic portrayal of the course of his activity: as a Galilean Jew Jesus would have regularly come to the festivals in Jerusalem rather than traveling there only once in a programmatic act.[2] His last meal also stands in the context of a Passover festival for which he came to Jerusalem. During these stays he could have frequently come into conflict with the Jews living there and in particular with those belonging to the leadership of the Jewish people or representatives that stood near to them. Such situations are reflected in the controversy dialogues that are reported from Jerusalem: Jesus disputes with the Jewish authorities over the question of his authority (Mark 11.27-33), with the Pharisees over the question of paying taxes (Mark 12.13-17), with the Sadducees over the resurrection of the dead (Mark 12.18-27), with a scribe over the most important commandment (Mark 12.28-34), and with multiple scribes over the Christ's Davidic sonship (Mark 12.35-37). Jesus' position on central questions of the Jewish law and his stance toward the political power come to expression in these disputes.

The tone becomes much sharper in the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12.1-12). Here, the legitimacy of the Jewish leaders is attacked in a sharper form: the vinedressers who have leased the

vineyard from its owner show themselves to be unworthy because they kill the servants and even the son of the owner of the vineyard. The parable could definitely go back to Jesus in its basic structure and message: it radically calls into question the view that the leaders of the Jewish people actually lead it in the way God intends and demonstrates this with the claim that they not only fail to listen to the prophets sent by God to Israel (in the parable: the servants), but they even kill them. That Jesus saw himself in the series of these prophets—namely as the final, decisive emissary of God to his people—can be reconciled well with the profile of the rest of his activity. The designation of Jesus as "Son" could have been taken into the parable at a later stage of the tradition, for it already presupposes the exclusively understood designation of Son for Jesus, which probably belongs to the formation of the early Christian confession. Nevertheless, it is completely conceivable that Jesus formulated his claim and his stance toward the Jewish authorities with this parable.

Thus, in the Jerusalem controversies we are dealing with confrontations that presumably took place on different occasions and were joined into a complex of Jerusalem controversy dialogues in the synoptic portrayals, which report only one stay in Jerusalem. This last stay could thus stand in a longer chain of multiple visits. Then one would not need to assume a single confrontation that pressed for a decision, but one could indeed assume that Jesus appeared in Jerusalem with a high claim that brought the Jerusalem leaders against him. Jesus must have been thoroughly aware of the fact that Jerusalem, as the headquarters of the Jewish leadership and as the political and religious center of Judaism, was an especially precarious place for such behavior. Thus a similar picture arises as already in Galilee: Jesus did not seek out conflict with the political or religious leadership, but he did not avoid it either if it could be seen to emerge as a consequence of his activity.

It also supports such a judgment that the entrance into Jerusalem in the Synoptics shows clear features of the stylization of a one time, special action. Especially in Luke, Jesus' turning to Jerusalem means a new turning point: Jesus already directs the view to Jerusalem in Luke 9.51; all that follows thus stands under the sign of his way that will be completed there. The entrance into Jerusalem itself also belongs to this configuration. It is described with reference to the prophetic

saying about the entrance of the Messiah-king into Jerusalem (Zech 9.9), which is celebrated by the enthusiastic crowd as the reestablishment of the reign of David.

Thus, the activity of Jesus is placed in the Gospels, each in its own way, within the horizon of the "finale" in Jerusalem and thus also of his approaching death.[3] This makes it especially necessary to ask about the historical connection between his activity and his execution. For this we begin with a passage from the Gospel of Luke, whose oldest core can probably be traced back to Jesus himself. When Jesus is warned about Antipas by the Pharisees, he responds,

> Go and say to this fox: behold, I drive out demons and perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I shall be perfected. For I must journey today and tomorrow and the following day, for a prophet may not be killed outside of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing. Behold, your house is forsaken. But I say to you: you will not see me until the day on which you say: "blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 13.32-35)

Jesus speaks here about the meaning of his mission: he leads an itinerant existence characterized by exorcisms and healings. The completion of this activity lies not in the hand of Antipas but rather in the hand of God. Therefore, the first sentence of the quoted section probably originates with Jesus himself. The continuation is an interpretation joined to it: his death is now localized in Jerusalem and interpreted as the fate of a prophet. In the background stands the Jewish tradition of the violent death of the prophets. This says that Israel has already frequently rejected and even mishandled and killed the prophets sent to it by God. We are thus dealing with an early interpretation of the death of Jesus, which understands it against the background of his mission to Israel, without more far-reaching interpretations—for example in the sense of a salvific death for the removal of sins—being bound up with it. We have already encountered such an understanding as the violent fate of a prophet in the parable of the wicked tenants; it is also found in another tradition, namely in Q 11.49-51.

It is completely conceivable that Jesus made recourse to such an interpretation in the face of his looming death. It could support this view that this interpretation does not correspond with the later events.[4] Jesus was not put to death by "Jerusalem"—which here means: by the Jewish authorities—but by the Roman administration (even if it was with the participation of the Sanhedrin); he was not, as it says in Luke 13.34, stoned but crucified; he was not, as is presupposed in Mark 12, killed in Jerusalem (in the "vineyard") and then cast out, but outside of Jerusalem. Thus, a fair amount speaks for the view that in the allusion to the violent fate of the prophets we are dealing with an explanation drawn upon by Jesus himself for his approaching fate that was looming in view of the intensifying conflict with the Jewish authorities.

Thus, in the Luke text traditions have been placed together that belong to different phases of the activity of Jesus: in the answer to Antipas Jesus emphasizes his independence from Antipas, which appears meaningful only during his activity in Galilee. By contrast, the sentences that follow are oriented to Jerusalem as the place of his violent death. Thus, they already presuppose that Jesus had before his eyes his death in Jerusalem due to the intensifying situation. The different addressees of the sayings thus show that Luke has joined traditions here in order to bring into view, already in the middle of his activity, the meaning of his mission and its completion in Jerusalem. In the process, he probably preserved well the meaning that Jesus himself gave to his activity, including his death.[5]

## Causes for the Arrest and Execution of Jesus

What led to the arrest of Jesus and his execution during his last stay in Jerusalem? In order to answer this question it is necessary, on the one hand, to consider that only the Roman administration was permitted to pronounce and carry out a death sentence. This comes to expression not least in the fact that in all the sources—including the extra-Christian ones—the execution of Jesus under Pontius Pilate is reported. Both Josephus and Tacitus mention this fact; the reports of the Gospels agree on this point; the Roman prefect has even managed to make it into the Christian confession of faith.[6] The crucifixion

under Pontius Pilate therefore belongs to the most certain events of the activity of Jesus.

On the other hand, in both the Gospels and Josephus an involvement in the events is also ascribed to the Jewish high council (Josephus speaks of the "most distinguished of our people"): they are the ones who have Jesus arrested (Mark 14.43-52/John 18.1-11); they hold a hearing and decide that he must die. But since they are not permitted to kill Jesus themselves (cf. John 18.31), they hand him over to Pontius Pilate, who has him crucified.

That both the Jewish and the Roman sides participated in the events can be regarded as historically probable. It can also be assumed that the portrayal found in Luke and John is accurate, according to which the high council carried out only a *hearing* with Jesus and not a proper *trial* with a death sentence, as Matthew and Mark describe. Since there would not have been legal grounds for such a trial, it is more likely that we should reckon with a nightly hearing.

Thus, one must distinguish between the interest of the Jewish high council and that of the Roman military administration in the execution of Jesus. Here, one must take into account the fact that the Gospels show a tendency to stress in a particular way the guilt of the Jews in the death of Jesus, whereas they portray Pilate as a more uninterested protagonist who is pressed by the Jewish authorities and the people to condemn Jesus. This especially makes itself felt in the Gospel of John and then to an even stronger degree in the *Gospel of Peter*, but it is also recognizable in the Synoptic Gospels. This manner of presentation reacts to the rejection of the Christian message by the majority of the Jews and thus is already a witness for the emerging process of separation between Jews and Christians. Nevertheless, one can still assume a participation of the Sanhedrin, which all the New Testament Gospels describe. It already supports this view that the Jewish authorities probably had their own interest in the removal of Jesus. This presumably comes to expression best in John 11.50. Here there is a report of a consultation of the Jewish authorities about how to proceed against Jesus since his great approval among the people could move the Romans to take "both the place [the temple is meant] and the people" from the Jewish leadership, thus they could remove their religious and political authority. In this situation Caiaphas, who held the office of high priest from 18 to 36 CE, says, "you do not

consider that it is better for you that one human being dies for the people than that the whole people perishes."

What John portrays here as the motive of the Jewish Sanhedrin can be comprehended well historically: Rome had already frequently proceeded with severity against people who claimed the office of king for themselves and set about to seduce the Jewish people to a rebellion. Even if such an activity did not correspond to the actual intention of Jesus, his activity among the people could have been understood in this way and have been perceived in a corresponding manner by the Romans. Through this the danger could again have been evoked that the Romans would deprive the Jewish leadership of the independence that still remained and fully take the power over the Jewish people into their own hands—as this then de facto also took place. It is therefore historically probable that the Jewish leadership initially had Jesus arrested for political-tactical considerations, then interrogated him in the house of the high priest in order to obtain a picture of his person and intentions, and finally handed him over to the Roman military administration. Such a course of events comes closer to the report of John than to that of Mark. At other points John also appears to have had reliable detailed information about the Jerusalem events. Here, it can be left open whether he reworked an older report of the Passion or whether he knew one or several of the Synoptic portrayals of the Passion events and possessed additional information.[7]

The view that the Jewish authorities acted out of the aforementioned political motives is strengthened by the observation that the thematic conflicts around the activity of Jesus would scarcely have been sufficient to hand him over to the Romans for execution. It is true that Jesus' activity was certainly provocative. He claimed to bring the will of God to light with his interpretation of the law and turned with this message to the whole Jewish people. With this, and especially with his understanding of "offensive [i.e., non-defensive] purity," he placed himself in competition with the Pharisees. As the "Son of Man" he claimed to be the representative of God, to act in his name, and to gather a new "family" of those who follow the will of God. That with this activity he remained unpopular with both the Pharisees and the Jerusalem temple aristocracy is obvious. But this would scarcely have led to measures that would result in his execution. The politically explosive situation in Judea and Jerusalem, however, caused such

activity to be viewed in another light. Here, it met with a constellation in which the leadership of the Jewish people had to act in a politically adept manner and not provoke conflicts through ill-considered actions that could easily escalate. In such a situation it was advisable from the perspective of the Jewish leadership to hand over a potential trouble-maker to the Romans in order to avert a greater danger.

Was there a concrete occasion for the arrest of Jesus? The historicity and meaning of the temple action are highly controversial in this connection. For one side it represents a symbolic action in the framework of his activity and at the same time the event that led to his arrest and condemnation.[8] Ed Parish Sanders even regards it as the most secure historical datum in the life of Jesus.[9] He understands it as a prophetic sign-act with which Jesus is said to have symbolically anticipated the coming destruction of the temple by God, and with the saying about another temple that was not made with hands he is said to have pointed ahead to the temple that God will set in the place of the existing one.

By contrast, other scholars judge the whole scene to be marked by so many historical improbabilities that they call its historicity entirely into question:[10] In the case of a spectacular action at the temple site, would not the Romans, who kept a watchful eye on the temple area from their fortress Antonia that bordered to the northwest, have been immediately on the spot, especially during Jewish festivals? Why does the temple action play a role neither in the hearing nor in the condemnation? Does a programmatic "cleansing" of the temple fit with Jesus, who otherwise argued for openness in questions of purity and precisely not for the preservation of ritually pure places?

A third solution therefore runs: there was a temple action of Jesus, but it was much less spectacular than what is described in the Gospels. It was first stylized into a fundamental calling into question of the temple in later tradition by temple-critical circles in primitive Christianity.

The driving out of the sellers and money changers should presumably be viewed together with the other tradition related to the temple, namely the tradition about Jesus' prediction of its destruction.

> "Not one stone will remain on the other which will not be destroyed." (Mark 13.2b)

> And some stood up, made false statements against him, and said: "we heard him saying: 'I will destroy this temple made with hands and in three days build another that is not made with hands.'" (Mark 14.57-58)
>
> Two men came forward and said: "this one said: 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and in three days build it again.'" (Matt 26.60-61)
>
> [At the interrogation of Stephen:] False witnesses stood up and said: "this man does not cease speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say: 'This Nazorean Jesus will tear down this place and change the customs that Moses gave us.'" (Acts 6.13-14)
>
> "Tear this temple down and in three days I will raise it up again." . . . But he was speaking about the temple of his body. (John 2.19, 21)
>
> Another version is found in *Gos. Thom.* 71: Jesus says: "I will destroy [this] house and no one will be able to rebuild it."[11]

Early Christianity evidently had considerable problems with this tradition. Especially after the Romans had actually destroyed the temple in 70 CE, the prophecy attributed to Jesus brought the Christian community into an uncomfortable situation. In Mark it is therefore placed in the mouths of false witnesses. In Matthew it is relativized by the formulation "I *can* destroy the temple of God. . . ." John interprets it no longer in relation to the temple but symbolically in relation to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Luke leaves it out of his Gospel completely and places it in the mouths of false witnesses against Stephen in Acts. We are evidently dealing with various attempts to deal with an uncomfortable tradition. Which finding can be located behind these attempts?

If we start from the assumption that with the versions of Matthew and Luke we are dealing with versions of the saying from Mark, then we have a Synoptic and a Johannine form of the saying before us. The decisive difference consists in the fact that in John Jesus exhorts *his addressees* to tear down the temple, whereas according to the other versions he claims that he will do it *himself*. The latter, however, are always (except for in the *Gospel of Thomas*) "debunked" as false witnesses. In John, by contrast, the saying is actually attributed to Jesus, though as a riddle pointing ahead to his death that the Jews do not understand but take literally. For they refer to the temple of Herod,

which has been under construction for forty-six years and which Jesus could build again in three days (John 2.20).[12] Thus, in the Synoptics Jesus is absolved of a saying against the temple; in John it is christologically reinterpreted and related to his execution through the Jews and to his resurrection—John uses here a verb that can mean both "build" (in relation to structures) and "rise (from the dead)," and then in the passive "to be resurrected."[13]

The different interpretations reveal that Jesus announced the destruction of the temple in a manner that can no longer be reconstructed exactly. The action in the temple can also be placed in connection with this. The concern will hardly be with an event that has been invented. Nevertheless, the aforementioned arguments against the historicity of a spectacular action on the temple site must be taken seriously. They do not rule out, however, the possibility that Jesus underlined his criticism of the temple in a symbolic sign-act, which was stylized into a fundamental act in order to legitimize the temple-critical stance of circles in early Christianity. In analogy to his criticism of the purity laws, the meaning of Jesus' action apparently consisted in calling into question the constitution of Israel that was oriented toward the existing institutions. His vision of a fundamental renewal of Israel reaches back to a time that lies before these institutions. Therefore, he can measure the law by the order of creation and in the same way call the temple into question as a provisional institution made by human beings. In Jesus' action the concern is not with a temple *cleansing* but with a *calling into question of the institution* of the temple as such.

Did Jesus expect a "new temple" in the place of the previous one? This is not suggested by the second part of the aforementioned prophecy: in Mark a "temple not made with hands" is mentioned; in Matthew the concern is only with the announcement of Jesus' power to *be able* to tear down and build up and not with an actual intention; in John an allusion is made to his resurrection. Thus, what Jesus will put in the place of the temple according to these sayings can only be designated as a "temple" metaphorically, whereas the concern is not with a building in the sense of the new temple described in Ezek 40–48. Thus, the reign of God expected by Jesus did not include the replacement of the existing temple with another one. Rather, the institution of the temple as such should disappear because its function was

surpassed in light of the immediate presence of God.[14] The programmatic action of Jesus in the temple would thus aim at symbolizing the significance of the temple that had come to an end. The analogy to John the Baptist, who also wanted to prepare Israel for the immediate encounter with God through his activity in the wilderness and the immersion in the Jordan, is plain to see.

The sayings and actions directed against the temple provide the concrete occasion for arresting Jesus. With the calling into question of the temple as the center of the identity of Israel, Jesus had made himself guilty of transgressing a boundary that was no longer acceptable to the leadership of the Jewish people. With the temple he called into question the central institution of the Jewish people upon which its identity was based in large part. That he triggered a considerable provocation can be reconciled well with his self-understanding as the representative of God who confronts Israel with the establishment of God's kingdom. This conflict is accurately brought to expression in the Gospels, even if they attribute a greater share in the execution to the Jewish leadership and especially to the Jewish people than is likely to have been the case historically. The polemical features that emphasize this in an especially drastic way include the unrelenting "crucify him" call of the Jews before Pilate and the self-curse of the people in the Gospel of Matthew ("his blood be on us and our children"; Matt 27.25), with which the Jewish people take on responsibility for the death of Jesus—and thus, as Matthew formulates from a later perspective, simultaneously call judgment upon themselves.

For the Roman administration the Jerusalem temple, as the political-religious center of Jerusalem, was a place that demanded special attention. For this reason, when they took over the governance in Judea after the deposition of Herod's son Archelaus, they placed the whole area under their control. The fact that nothing is said about an intervention of the Romans in connection with the temple action of Jesus and the fact that it plays no role in the trial before Pilate speak for the view that in this action it was a matter of a calling into question of the significance of the temple that had to lead to a death sentence in the eyes of the Jewish leadership but not of a spectacular action on the temple site directly before the eyes of the Roman occupying power. From the Roman perspective the Jesus who was handed over to them by the Sanhedrin was a rebel like others as they frequently appeared

among the Jewish people in order to fight against the foreign rule and seize the kingly rule for themselves. The type of execution leaves no doubt about what one should expect from such ambitions: Jesus was nailed to a cross on a hill in the vicinity of the city together with two criminals, and an inscription on the cross publicly made known the cause for the execution: this is the end of one who claims to be "king of the Jews." This was an unmistakable demonstration of who actually had the power in the land.

## The Last Supper

The tradition of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples occupies a special position within the Passion events. The reason for this is that the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper is traced back to its institution by Jesus, which has found expression in the tradition of this meal.[15] In the Synoptic presentations three interpretative tendencies can be recognized, on the basis of which the Last Supper will be addressed in what follows.[16] Here, we will also look briefly at the report of Paul, who also knows of Jesus' Last Supper and even introduces the only biographical note from the life of Jesus in this context, namely "the night in which he was handed over" (1 Cor 11.23).

The Synoptic Gospels describe the Last Supper as a Passover meal. In John, however, this is already otherwise: here Jesus is already crucified on the evening on which the Passover begins, thus the Last Supper takes place on the day before. This placement results in a different datum for the death of Jesus: in the Synoptics Jesus dies on the Passover festival itself; in John he dies on the day of preparation for the Passover, thus one day earlier. Both portrayals make the Passover context fruitful for the interpretation of the Passion events in their own respective ways: John places the Passion event as a whole within the horizon of the approaching Passover festival, which is mentioned for the first time in 11.55, and understands the death of Jesus against this background: according to John 19.36, in the death of Jesus the Scripture is fulfilled, according to which none of "his" bones shall be broken. The passage originally refers (Exod 12.46, in the Septuagint already in v. 10) to the Passover lamb that must be without blemish, and it is applied to Jesus against this background. This stands in the

broader context of the interpretation of the death of Jesus in the Gospel of John, which cannot be addressed in further detail here.

In the Synoptic Gospels, by contrast, the Passover context is drawn upon for the interpretation of Jesus' Last Supper. Moreover, it is specifically described how Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead to Jerusalem in order for them to prepare the Passover meal in a room designated for this (Mark 14.12-16 par.). Some of the characteristics of the meal itself—the nightly time period, the reclining at table, the interpretation of the elements of the meal by Jesus—could fit with this portrayal. But on the whole it is conspicuous that the Passover theme no longer plays a role in the portrayal of the actual meal. When Jesus first breaks the bread and interprets it, then hands around the cup and likewise speaks a word of interpretation, then this no longer has much to do with the course of a Passover meal. The words of interpretation over the bread and wine apparently emerged independently and were connected only after the fact with the portrayal of the last meal as a Passover meal.

It follows from this that if the last meal of Jesus was actually a Passover meal—which is possible but uncertain—then it played only a subordinate role for the interpretation of this meal. The historical basis for mentioning it at all is presumably first that the Passion events took place around a Passover festival. In the Synoptic Gospels this led to the portrayal of the last meal as a Passover meal. The reason for this could be that at the Passover festival the exodus of Israel from Egypt was remembered, thus an event that possessed fundamental significance for the emergence and identity of the people of Israel. Correspondingly, the last meal of Jesus could be understood as an institution that possessed constitutive meaning for the emergence and self-understanding of early Christianity as a distinct community founded by Jesus. Thus, through the link to the Passover festival the Last Supper of Jesus was interpreted as an event that possesses constitutive meaning for the Jesus community: In the celebration of the meal the community ensures its origin; it joins itself with Jesus in the shared bread and in the cup and makes present the salvation mediated by him. That we are dealing here with an analogy to the Passover—thus, certain aspects are common but differences simultaneously exist—is clear not least in the fact that from the beginning the Christian community gathered at least once a week for the

sacramental meal, whereas the Passover festival was celebrated only once a year.

Alongside the Passover interpretation there is a second line in the interpretation of the activity and fate of Jesus through the words spoken over the bread and cup (the so-called "words of institution"). These probably do not come from the historical context of the Last Supper itself but represent an independent primitive Christian interpretation of this meal. This is already suggested by the fact that they have already undergone a tradition process before their reception in the New Testament writings in which the words over the bread and the cup were adjusted to each other in various ways: in Mark the parallel formulations "this is my body—this is my blood of the covenant" stand over against each other; in Paul the instruction "do this in remembrance of me" occurs with both words.

Two lines of tradition with their own respective accents can be identified behind this material: Mark and Matthew include only the phrase "this is my body" in the saying over the bread, whereas the explanation "for you" from Paul and Luke is lacking. The "for you" is made clear, however, through the gestures of the breaking and distributing of the bread. In the saying over the cup Mark and Matthew speak of the "blood of the covenant," whereas Paul and Luke include the phrasing "this cup is the new covenant in my blood." It becomes clear in this formulation that it is—in analogy to the bread that is broken and distributed—*the cup that is passed around* that grants the participants in the meal a share in the new covenant established by Jesus.

The forgiveness of sins, however, is explicitly brought into connection with the Last Supper only in Matthew. This can be explained, as we already saw earlier, by the fact that for Matthew a central role is played by the forgiveness made possible through the turning of God to his people in Jesus, for which reason he removes the reference to the forgiveness of sins from John's baptism and places it here. This is explicitly emphasized once more by making the forgiveness of sins the content of the covenant established by Jesus.

The words of institution relate the broken bread and the passed-around cup to the body and blood of Jesus. The bread word looks back to the activity of Jesus as an existence for others: the activity of Jesus was one that was for human beings, which finds symbolic expression in the distribution of the one loaf. The cup word looks ahead

to his death, in which the participants in the meal—symbolized in the common cup—also receive a share and which is therefore also a death for others.[17] Thus, with the words of institution we are dealing with a summarizing interpretation of the life and death of Jesus. By relating these words to the elements of the meal, the early community interpreted this meal as a symbolic sharing in Jesus. It thus connected itself to his life and his death and simultaneously looked ahead to his coming again.

The last aspect mentioned leads to the third line, the perspective on the completion of the kingdom of God. In the Synoptic reports this comes to expression in the so-called "renunciation word" of Jesus:

> I will no longer drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God. (Mark 14.25)
>
> or:
>
> I will not drink from the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes. (Luke 22.18)

In Luke this is also connected with the Passover festival: Jesus distinguishes the last Passover that he now celebrates with his disciples from the end-time Passover in the kingdom of God (Luke 22.16). In Paul it corresponds with the perspective on the Lord who is coming again: the meal of the community is interpreted as a proclamation of the death of Jesus "until he comes" (1 Cor 11.26).

In the "renunciation word" we are dealing with the part of the meal tradition that can best be placed in the proclamation of Jesus: here mention is made of the kingdom of God into which Jesus expects to enter after his death. Jesus presumably celebrated the Last Supper in this hope: the situation had intensified to such an extent in the meantime that he had to reckon with his impending condemnation and execution. In light of this the question became pressing of how his expected death could be understood within the framework of the dawning reign of God proclaimed by him. Even in the light of his approaching death, Jesus apparently held fast to the conviction that the reign of God had dawned and would continue to establish itself.

Thus, he did not view his looming death as an aberration with regard to his mission or as its failure. Rather, in Mark 14.25 the conviction is expressed that his personal fate will be completed through his entrance into the kingdom of God. Thus, the reign of God that is already dawning will establish itself further through the activity of those who act in his name and authority. This was simultaneously the impulse for the primitive Christian conviction that Jesus himself would now be with his community as the exalted Lord. This development from the function of the earthly Jesus to that of the exalted Jesus comes to expression above all in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke: at the end of the Gospel of Matthew the Risen One says to his disciples that he will be with them until the completion of the present age; in Luke the changed role of Jesus becomes clear through the narrative of his ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit through the Exalted One (Acts 2).

The findings concerning the Last Supper can be summarized as follows: Jesus probably gathered his disciples for a final meal together on the evening before his death. He apparently saw the meaning of this event in the fact that it was the last meal in the circle of his closest disciples before he would complete his earthly fate and enter into the reign of God. This situation of a farewell meal provided an occasion to reflect on the meaning of his mission and the development after his death. Jesus did this by celebrating a fellowship meal that symbolized the enduring connection between himself and his disciples and simultaneously spoke about his own completion in the reign of God. That he also created the institution of a meal that was to be regularly repeated by his followers is less certain. Mark and Matthew lack any reference to such a repetition; Luke and Paul, who relate the repetition to the community's "breaking of bread" or to the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a whole, already presuppose the meal celebration in the primitive communities and trace this back to the Last Supper of Jesus. Nevertheless, an impulse went forth from Jesus' Last Supper that led to the regular celebration in the Christian communities of a cult meal that has been celebrated until today for the purpose of making Jesus present. This impulse lies in the gesture of the distribution of bread and wine and in the fact that Jesus spoke of his drinking of the wine in the reign of God and announced its imminent coming. It

was natural for early Christianity to develop from this the ritual of a common meal in which there was a celebration of their communion with the exalted Jesus and a looking ahead to his coming again.

## Was the Death of Jesus a Salvific Death?

It follows from the preceding comments that Jesus did not seek out his violent death or understand it as a necessary component of his mission. Thus, his understanding of the reign of God did not include the necessity of his death for the sins of human beings. With this view we are dealing instead with a primitive Christian interpretation that already presupposes the fact of the death of Jesus and connects it with the faith in the enduring significance of his mission and his claim. Thus, the understanding of the death of Jesus as a sin-removing, salvific death for human beings already presupposes that the significance of the mission of Jesus was not called into question by his death. On this foundation his death itself could then also be understood as a saving event.

While Jesus did not understand his death as a necessary component of his mission, he also did not view it as the failure of his activity. Rather, in the face of his looming death he held fast to the conviction that God would complete the establishment of his reign. He interpreted his own fate in the horizon of the prophets who were sent to Israel but were rejected and killed by it. Can aspects of the interpretation of his death be established for Jesus himself beyond this?

In the Jesus tradition one can discern a clear tendency to interpret his violent death as part of his way and thus to place it in God's plan of salvation. The formulations that speak of the *necessity* of his suffering and death are characteristic of this. For example,

> The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders and the high priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. (Mark 8.31)

> Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory? (Luke 24.26)

This "must" stresses the death of Christ as a necessary component of his activity by understanding it as an intended part of the plan of God from the beginning. This lies along the same line as the interpretation that Jesus himself connected with his death when he viewed it as the completion of his mission. The understanding of a divine plan of salvation that included his death from the beginning admittedly goes beyond Jesus' own view. Neither Jesus himself nor his first followers reckoned with the fact that God had planned such a cruel fate for his representative from the beginning! Rather, this interpretation says: even if human beings stand against God's emissary and even kill him in a cruel manner, this does not call the power of God over history into question. Thus, we are dealing with a theology-of-history interpretation of the way of Jesus that holds fast to the legitimacy of his claim and to the power of God to direct history even in the face of his death. Talk of a "cruel" God who has "sacrificed" his son fails to recognize this structure and therefore goes astray from the outset.

Beyond this we find only a few statements in the Gospels that can be claimed for more far-reaching interpretations of his death by Jesus himself. The only two passages that could be discussed here show themselves to be post-Easter interpretations. The first passage is the saying from Mark 10.45, "For the Son of Man also did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The metaphor of "ransom" designates a compensation that is brought by Jesus in order to liberate human beings (here the "many" means all people). It does not explicitly say what they are liberated from. It is apparently presupposed that human beings find themselves in a broken relation to God that is transformed into an intact relation through Jesus. The "compensation" that is brought for this is Jesus' own life. One does not have to refer this exclusively to his death. The life that the Son of Man Jesus gives as a ransom can mean his entire existence, thus it can include his activity for others right through to his death. This "price" is paid so that human beings receive the possibility of renewing their relation to God from the ground up. Here, the existence of Jesus for others is concretely in mind: he confronted them with the dawning of the reign of God, brought God near to them, and founded a community in which the will of God is done. He went along this way, through which he liberated human beings

from their distance from God and their guilt that separates them from God, up to the very consequence of his death. Thus, the concern—in a similar manner as with the words of institution—is with an overall interpretation of the way of Jesus and not with an interpretation that is specifically related to his death.

The episode at the end of which this saying appears (Mark 10.35-45) is concerned with the question of order within the Jesus community. Here, the Son of Man who does not cause himself to be served but rather serves others stands as the model for the community of his followers. The continuation about the Son of Man giving his life as a ransom for many goes beyond this context.[18] This already shows that we are dealing with a saying in which primitive Christianity brought the liberating effect of the death of Jesus to expression with the help of the "ransom" metaphor. It also supports this view that the perspective is clearly expanded: the reference to the "many" brings into view a universal effect of the death of Jesus in which all human beings can participate in principle. This also represents an interpretation that goes beyond Jesus and reflects on his way in fundamental dimensions.

The second passage is the formulation concerning the blood poured out "for the many" that occurs in the word over the cup. Here too we are most likely dealing, as we have already seen, with a post-Easter tradition about the meaning of the life and death of Jesus, which, as now becomes clear, is related, even in their formulations (the phrase "for the many" occurs in both sayings), to Mark 10.45. With this it becomes clear that in the Jesus tradition impulses were taken up that resulted from the activity of Jesus himself. His existence for others, down to the very consequence of his death, was compressed after Easter into formulations that reflected on his way, with the inclusion of his death, in fundamental statements. In view of the strong emphasis on the meaning of the death of Jesus in Western theology, we must take care to remain conscious of this broader horizon.

By contrast, statements about a salvific meaning of the *death* of Jesus in particular are not found in the Jesus tradition. A good explanation can be given for this finding: Jesus himself did not understand his death as a salvific death for the forgiveness of sins or as a sacrifice that was to be offered to God. Rather, for him his death meant the completion of his own activity for the establishment of the reign of God, which his followers would advocate in the future and at whose

completion he would be present again. Therefore, his death was understood in the framework of this overall horizon and not interpreted in detachment from it as an isolated event.

As we have already noted at several other points, in the interpretation of his death lines can thus also be drawn from the activity of Jesus to the post-Easter interpretations. The understanding of his fate in the framework of his activity for the reign of God led to the interpretation of his death as part of the plan of God with him. The orientation of his activity to all Israel—and also sporadically beyond it—led to the interpretation of his whole existence, including his death, as an existence for others—for "many." Following his self-understanding as the last messenger of God sent to Israel, primitive Christianity also took up the Israelite tradition of the violent fate of the prophets for the interpretation of his death.

By contrast, other interpretations of the death of Jesus clearly go beyond the aspects that can be brought into connection with Jesus himself. The notions of his dying for our sins (1 Cor 15.3; Gal 1.4), of the cross as a place established by God for the cleansing from sins (Rom 3.25), of Jesus as the unique high priest who offers himself as an offering (Heb 8–10), or of the protection from the wrath of God brought about through the death of Jesus (1 Thess 1.10; 5.9-10) are innovative interpretations that surround the death of Jesus with a broad spectrum of possibilities of understanding. Fundamental here is the structure of life and death for others that has its basis in the activity of Jesus himself, which could also lead then to interpretations specifically connected with his death as a salvific death. With this, however, we are already moving beyond the understanding that can be presupposed for Jesus himself.

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# 13

# Jesus and the Beginnings of Christian Faith

In this chapter we will discuss traditions that belong to the oldest Christology: statements about Jesus' resurrection and ascension, his sitting at the right hand of God, his preexistence, and his mediation of creation (*Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*). These have intentionally not been placed in chapter 14, "Spotlights on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Jesus," for the following reasons:

We already established in the introduction that in the oldest portrayals of Jesus and in the historical-critical conceptions of modernity event and interpretation enter into a connection with each other in respectively distinct ways. In the course of our portrayal of Jesus we have repeatedly come across this connection. Jesus is accessible to us only in the way in which he had an effect upon the people of his time, which the witnesses about him have gathered and handed down. Past events are always accessible only as *interpreted* events; without these interpretations, by contrast, they belong to the past that is no longer accessible to us. Therefore, in contrast to what has long been claimed in Jesus scholarship, there is no fundamental difference between a pre-Easter Jesus and his post-Easter interpretation—no "Easter ditch" that would set the two categorically against each other. The pre-Easter Jesus is also an interpreted Jesus; the statements about his resurrection and exaltation are also based on experiences that have gone forth from his earthly activity.[1]

It would therefore be a misapprehension to want to set off the "real" Jesus against the Jesus *interpreted* with the help of the Easter experiences. This already becomes clear in the fact that we are dealing in the case of the first witnesses of these events with human beings from the immediate environment of Jesus. Thus, there is a personal continuity between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter periods: the experiences that the male and female followers of Jesus had during his earthly activity represent the foundation for the Easter experiences, which thus cannot be made comprehensible without a basis in the activity of Jesus. Therefore, it would not be sensible to make a sharp break between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus and have the history of Christianity begin only with the Easter witnesses.[2]

For the engagement with Jesus this means that the early Christian statements about his resurrection and exaltation belong to the perception of his person. Undoubtedly, we are not dealing here with historically verifiable facts. But this also applies, for example, to the confession of Jesus as the Anointed One or his self-understanding as the Son of Man. Whether Jesus' power over the demons comes from God or from Satan, whether he interprets the law or offends against it, cannot be answered simply with a reference to the events themselves, but already implies an answer to the question of their *meaning*. Naturally, one must take into account that the post-Easter interpretations are far-reaching and ascribe a role to Jesus that clearly goes beyond the immediate connections of his earthly activity. In the process, his way can even be placed in a cosmic context and described as a way that begins with God and leads back to him again.

Thus, we find ourselves in this chapter at the interface between the activity of Jesus and the Christology of primitive Christianity. This becomes clear first in the fact that the witnesses of the Risen One also include persons who do not come from the circle of the followers of Jesus, such as, for example, Paul and James, the brother of the Lord, and second in the fact that the interpretations of the activity and fate of Jesus are placed in new constellations. Finally, this also becomes clear in the fact that the initial beginnings of the emergence of Christianity as an independent religion can be identified: a distinct view of history, a distinct ethos, and distinct forms of religious life become recognizable. All this takes place in close connection to the activity of Jesus. In what follows this interface will be described in somewhat

greater detail. For this we will consider two thematic spheres: the resurrection and appearance narratives and the complex of statements surrounding the exaltation of Jesus.

## Resurrection, Empty Tomb, and Appearances: Death and No End

### The traditions about the resurrection and the empty tomb

According to the united witness of all four gospels of the New Testament Jesus was buried not far from the hill of Golgotha, upon which he was crucified, in a rock tomb that was closed afterward with a stone. This happened at the initiative of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the high council, who had obtained permission from Pilate to bury Jesus. This Joseph is portrayed very positively in all the Gospels. According to Mark he was waiting for the kingdom of God (Mark 15.43); Luke additionally calls him "good and righteous" (Luke 23.51); in Matthew and John he is even designated as "a disciple of Jesus" (Matt 27.57; John 19.38). Even if the increasingly positive depiction goes back to redactional shaping, there is no reason to doubt the historicity of the tradition about Joseph of Arimathea itself.

A further witness for the burial of Jesus is the primitive Christian confession that Paul cites in 1 Cor 15.3b-4: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and he was buried." This is conspicuous insofar as it normally belonged to the punishment of crucifixion that the crucified person was left hanging on the cross as a deterrent; thus his burial was prohibited. There are, however, also witnesses outside of the New Testament for the burial of crucified people: Philo mentions that before a festival permission could be granted for relatives to arrange a burial for people who had been crucified.[3]

Moreover, there is an interesting archaeological find: in 1968 the bones of a crucified person were discovered in an ossuary at a Jewish cemetery in Giv'at ha-Mivtar, a region in the northeast of today's Jerusalem. They can be identified by the fact that a nail was driven through both heel bones (fig. 13.1).

Furthermore, the reports of the Gospels agree—with light variations—that on the first day of the week (thus on a Sunday) women

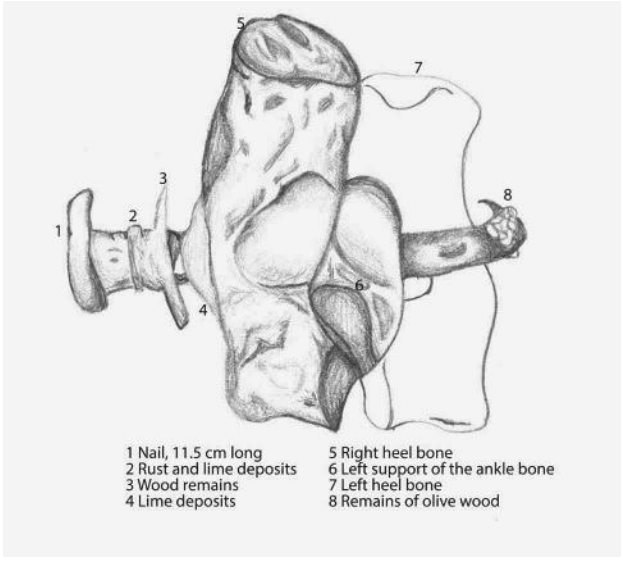


Figure 13.1
*Heel bone of a crucified person (finding from Giv'at ha-Mivtar in the northeast of Jerusalem). Re-creation by Rachel Smith. Cf. Bösen 1999, 278.*

(in the Gospel of John it is only Mary Magdalene) find the tomb of Jesus open and empty (in the Gospel of John Mary tells Peter and the beloved disciple about the open tomb, and they subsequently find it empty). This gives rise to the question of the historicity of the tradition of the empty tomb. Before we return to this question, we turn first to the primitive Christian confession texts.

The oldest primitive Christian confessions speak of Jesus' resurrection or exaltation without mentioning an empty tomb. Here, formulations such as 1 Cor 15.3-5; Rom 1.3-4; and Rom 10.9 may be mentioned:

> For I handed down to you at the beginning what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. (1 Cor 15.3-5)

> (The gospel of God) concerning his Son, who was born from the seed of David according to the flesh, who was appointed Son of God in power

> according to the Spirit of holiness through the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1.3-4)
>
> When you confess with your mouth "Lord Jesus" and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10.9)

Such confessions bring to expression the early Christian conviction that even after the execution of Jesus, God powerfully acted on him. The basis of this conviction is not the narrative of an empty tomb but the Jewish faith in the resurrection. The first traces of this belief are found in texts of the Old Testament in the notion that the power of God also does not come to an end at the boundary of death and he will deliver Israel.[4] In Jewish texts—thus, for example, in Dan 12.1-4, in *1 Enoch*, in the Wisdom of Solomon, and in 2 Maccabees—the notion of an individual resurrection of the dead occurs, namely in the form that God shows his power also beyond death on righteous people or martyrs and does not leave them in the hands of their adversaries. In the discussion of the Jewish "parties" we also encountered the fact that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection—for which reason the central faith convictions of Paul, as a former Pharisee, included, after his conversion, the resurrection of Jesus by God.

Faith in the resurrection is thus an expression of the conviction that there is justice in history, even when the experiences of calamity, suffering, and death appear to speak against this. Faith in the resurrection is therefore closely linked with faith in God's power of creation. For early Christianity God first demonstrated this power on Jesus, who could therefore be called the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" and whose resurrection could be understood as the beginning of the general resurrection of the dead (thus, e.g., 1 Cor 15.20, 52). The designation of God as the one "who raised Jesus from the dead" even became a primitive Christian characterization of God (e.g., Rom 4.24; Gal 1.1; Col 2.12; Eph 1.20; 1 Pet 1.21). In the faith in the resurrection of Jesus early Christianity simultaneously confessed that his claim to act in the name of God was not refuted by his death. If Jesus himself had held fast to the establishment of the reign of God in spite of his death, then early Christianity expanded this through the statements concerning the resurrection. The narrative of the discovery of the empty tomb is not necessarily connected with this.

Can the tradition of the empty tomb be secured historically, or is it a matter of a legend through which the confession of the resurrection was embellished with the help of a narrative? Alongside the fact that the confession texts fail to mention it, another negative finding must first be noted: the fact that the tomb of Jesus was not venerated in the early period of Christianity cannot—in contrast to what is sometimes claimed—be advanced as proof of the existence of an empty tomb, which is said to have not received veneration *because it was empty*. An empty tomb also could have been venerated—it would even have fit much better with the early Christian message of the resurrection. The fact that the tomb was not venerated was due rather to the fact that the Christian communities in the first three centuries lived in a legally uncertain situation and were even frequently persecuted. In such a situation, they could neither build churches of their own nor venerate cultic sites. This first changed in the fourth century, when Christianity was accepted and promoted by the Roman government. In this period the construction of Christian churches at the most important sites of the way of Jesus also began: corresponding to the Christian confession of the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, churches were built, at the instruction of Emperor Constantine (and at the initiative of his mother Helena), over the grotto of the nativity in Bethlehem, on the hill on which the cross of Jesus is supposed to have stood, on the nearby site where the tomb was suspected to be, and on the Mount of Olives, whence Jesus is supposed to have gone heavenward for the veneration of these places. For the determination of the place of crucifixion and burial one was dependent on older reports and recollections. Thus, the place at which the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built, which attracts many Christian pilgrims to this day, *could* be the place of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, but this cannot be proven with certainty. Thus, the archaeological findings contribute neither positively nor negatively to the question of the tradition of the empty tomb.

Did the story of the discovery of the empty tomb serve to connect the tradition of the burial of Jesus with the confession of the resurrection from the beginning? A further indication could point in this direction. At the center of the narrative of the empty tomb stands the confession "He is risen, he is not here!" (Mark 16.6). In a similar manner as with Peter's confession "You are the Christ!" (Mark 8.29) and with the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, in which the heavenly

voice declares him to be God's Son (Mark 1.11; 9.7), the story of the empty tomb is also shaped by a primitive Christian confession. Thus, it can be said that the narrative of the empty tomb does not represent the starting point, let alone the presupposition, for the confession of the resurrection of Jesus. As the aforementioned confession statements show, the faith in the resurrection was developed without referring to an empty tomb for this—although the burial of Jesus is mentioned in one of the oldest confession texts (1 Cor 15.4).

Thus, the findings presented thus far could lead one to regard the traditions about the empty tomb as a primitive Christian legend through which the confession of the resurrection of Jesus was to be illustrated after the fact. However, the versions of this history itself point in another direction. A narrative of the discovery of the empty tomb constructed on the basis of the confession of the resurrection in the form of 1 Cor 15.3b-5, for instance, would have presumably looked different. It would have had Peter find the tomb, which he would then have shown to the other disciples. While he was doing so the Risen One would have appeared to them. Women, who were regarded as unreliable witnesses, would certainly not have been the first to be informed of the message of the resurrection and also, as in Matthew, John, and the secondary ending of Mark (Mark 16.9-20), to receive the first appearances of the Risen One.

Thus, the tradition history of the tomb and appearance narratives does not support the judgment that these are legends based on the confession texts. Their tendency even runs counter to this view: the witness of the women is not yet designated as "idle talk" in Mark and Matthew, but it is designated as such in Luke, where Peter also convinces himself of the empty tomb (Luke 24.11-12). In John 21 Peter is first commissioned in an addendum with the "feeding of the lambs," and thus installed as leader of the community and made aware of his future martyrdom (John 21.15-19). Thus, the traditions of the discovery of the empty tomb point to the fact that we are most likely dealing—as we also are with the report about the burial and the resurrection witnesses—with an old tradition that was originally attached to different people than those named in 1 Cor 15, namely to the women around Mary Magdalene. The tendency to reshape this tradition first appears in later texts: in John the appearance before Peter and the beloved disciple is placed alongside the appearance

before Mary Magdalene; in Luke and in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* the Risen One no longer appears to the women at all.[5] This does not prove the historicity of the empty tomb. But the narratives do show that there was an old tradition according to which the women around Mary Magdalene were the first witnesses of the empty tomb and also the addressees of the first appearance of the Risen One.

Let us first summarize these findings. With the tradition of the burial of Jesus at the initiative of Joseph of Arimathea, the confessions of the resurrection of Jesus in the letters of the New Testament, and the narratives about the discovery of the empty tomb we have three old traditions that deal with the events after the death of Jesus. The burial of Jesus can be assumed to be historically reliable. That an empty tomb was found cannot, by contrast, be proven. With this tradition we could also be dealing with an old tradition that brings the resurrection witness to expression in its own way. We would then be dealing with a tradition that competes with the confession texts from the letters that is not attached to Peter and the circle of the Twelve but to the women around Mary Magdalene. Both traditions were later brought into connection with each other. In the process one can recognize a tendency to place Peter in the foreground at the expense of Mary Magdalene. This becomes especially clear in the reports about the appearances of the Risen One that we will look at in the next section.

From the early period on, the witness to the resurrection and the tradition of the empty tomb were a target of ridicule and polemic from the Jewish side and especially from the pagan side against Christianity. In the ears of educated Gentiles the claim that a dead man was raised was not merely unbelievable but downright ridiculous. This is reflected in the New Testament in the reaction of pagan philosophers to the speech of Paul on the Areopagus in Athens: Luke depicts very accurately how the curious Athenians initially listened to Paul but then made fun of his proclamation of the resurrection, shaking their heads (Acts 17.16-32). Another example from a later period is the controversy that Origen argued out with the pagan philosopher Celsus in his work *Against Celsus*, which appeared around 230 CE.[6] There, Celsus first cites the objections of a Jew who calls into question the view that a dead person could rise again with the same body. Second, Celsus himself then objects that faith in the resurrection could have come about from one of Jesus' followers having carried Jesus' image so vividly in himself

that he thought the dead man was alive. This could also explain how the reports of the appearance of the Risen One came about.

Thus, Christianity already confronted such objections against the teaching of the resurrection in antiquity. They crop up time and again up to the present. A recent example is the thesis advocated by Gerd Lüdemann that in the case of the appearances of the Risen One before Peter and Paul we are dealing with phenomena that can be explained psychologically. In this way, both are said to have come to terms with unconscious feelings—Peter with his feelings of guilt triggered by his denial of Jesus, Paul with an unacknowledged attraction to Jesus. Gerd Theissen has now made a different (and stronger) attempt to explain the phenomena psychologically in his book *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen. Eine Psychologie des Urchristentums* (Experience and Behavior of the First Christians: A Psychology of Primitive Christianity). It cannot, by contrast, be proven that an actual debate (e.g., one in which the Jews actually accused the early Christian community of stealing the body of Jesus) stands behind Matt 28.11-15 (the soldiers were bribed to spread the rumor that the disciples stole the body of Jesus). Rather, with this episode we are dealing with a story constructed by Matthew that underlines the rejection of the faith witness by the Jews.

## The appearances of the Risen One

The reports about the appearances of the Risen One stand in close connection to the statements about the resurrection. The oldest text is again found in Paul. In the aforementioned text from 1 Cor 15 he lists a whole series of appearance witnesses: Cephas, the circle of the twelve, James, over five hundred brothers, all the apostles, and last of all himself (1 Cor 15.5-8). These verses can be read as a short history of the authorities of primitive Christianity: Cephas and the circle of the twelve played an important role in the initial period of the Jerusalem community; later this was taken over by James, the brother of Jesus. It is also important to Paul that he can refer for himself to an appearance of the Risen One. By contrast, the women who found the empty tomb according to the Gospels and were also the first addressees of an appearance of Jesus in Matthew and John (here it is Mary

Magdalene) are not mentioned by Paul. In its original form the Gospel of Mark does not yet contain any appearance stories; in Luke Jesus first appears to Simon and then to the two Emmaus disciples. This confirms the finding that with the witnesses of the resurrection and the witnesses of the appearances of Jesus we are dealing with different traditions. These traditions simultaneously provide information about the constellations in primitive Christianity.

The appearance of the Risen One is closely connected with the grounding of authority in early Christianity. The Risen One commissions the disciples to teach and to baptize (Matt 28.19-20); he imparts the Spirit (John 20.22) or points ahead to the coming of the Spirit as a presupposition for the Gentile mission (Luke 24.47-49). This is developed further in the apocryphal gospels of the second and third centuries. Here, an appearance of the risen Jesus is taken as the starting point for a teaching in which the recipient of revelation functions as a guarantor of this teaching (such as, e.g., Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Mary*, James in the *Apocryphon of James*, or the twelve disciples in the *Epistle to the Apostles*). Thus, the appearances legitimate the tradents of the teaching of Jesus: they either put into force again the teaching set forth during his earthly activity or become the starting point for a new teaching of chosen persons.

Additional themes are connected with the appearance statements. They serve to authenticate the resurrection: In Luke 24.39-43 the Risen One shows his disciples his hands and feet and eats fish before their eyes as proof that he is not a spirit (Luke 24.36-43). In the Gospel of John he exhorts Thomas to touch his hands and his side (John 20.24-29). Thus, it is precisely in these later gospels that the actuality of the resurrection is stressed.

In addition, the continuity between the time of the earthly Jesus and the time of the primitive Christian community is established through the appearances: according to the Gospel of Mark, the disciples will encounter the Risen One in Galilee. The proclamation of the gospel to all nations (Mark 13.10) is thus linked to Jesus' activity in Galilee. In Matthew this point is formulated even more clearly: the Risen One issues the commission to Gentile mission in Galilee—which is also called "Galilee of the Gentiles" in the Gospel of Matthew. In Luke, by contrast, the primitive Christian history has its starting point in Jerusalem, where the disciples remain at the behest

of the Risen One and wait for the reception of the Spirit. In the Gospel of John there are appearances in both Jerusalem (chap. 20) and in Galilee (chap. 21). Here, two traditions were presumably combined with each other. Finally, Luke sets a special accent with the narrative of the appearance before the Emmaus disciples, who recognize Jesus at the breaking of the bread. In this way, this ritual, whose repetition Jesus himself had arranged at the Last Supper, is instituted by the Risen One himself as the meal of the post-Easter community.

Through the traditions of resurrection, empty tomb, and appearances of the Risen One, early Christianity surrounded the death of Jesus with an aura of interpretations that especially bring to expression the view that the crucifixion of Jesus was merely the end of his earthly activity. The conviction about God's activity in and through Jesus, however, was not called into question through his death. Instead, it was expanded through the faith in the risen Jesus, who will also be with his community in the future. With this, continuity between the pre-Easter and post-Easter period was simultaneously created: although it is in a different way, Jesus nevertheless continues to be present—as the Lord of his community or in the Spirit. This shows that the activity of Jesus left traces with his followers that made it impossible to declare his activity as having ended with his death, let alone as having failed. Thus, although the post-Easter confessions expansively interpret the activity of Jesus and thereby introduce some new elements, they cannot be understood without a basis in the activity of Jesus himself.

## Exaltation to God: Jesus as Lord

Another primitive Christian tradition speaks of the exaltation of Jesus and his installation into the position of power at the right hand of God. Again, we first encounter corresponding traditions in the epistolary literature. However, these statements have experienced a narrative configuration as "ascension" only with Luke, who introduces a corresponding narrative at both the end of his Gospel and the beginning of Acts.

The exaltation statements must be distinguished from those about his resurrection. This already becomes clear in the fact that resurrection, exaltation, and outpouring of the Spirit (thus the traditions

behind the church feasts of Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost) were brought into a narrative connection only in the Gospel of Luke: Jesus is resurrected, he appears to the disciples, he goes before their eyes into heaven, and he sends his Spirit from there (Luke 24; Acts 1–2). Two complexes of statements with their own respective contents were thereby combined with each other: the resurrection statements serve, as we have seen, the confirmation of the activity of Jesus through God, and the appearance statements connected with them serve the legitimation of the witnesses and the continuity between pre-Easter history and post-Easter history. By contrast, the statements about the exaltation of Jesus are directed toward his participation in the authority of God: Jesus is taken up to God; he receives the place at his right hand and will also come again from there to carry out the judgment.

Thus, being taken up to God is not necessarily bound up with the death of the one who is taken up. Rather, what is decisive in this tradition is the fact that the ones taken up are with God and can therefore return from there to the earth. According to Jewish tradition, Enoch and Elijah, for example, were taken up, and there are also traditions of Moses, Ezra, and Baruch being taken up. The narrative of the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9.2-8) presupposes the taking up of Moses and Elijah, who can therefore meet Jesus there. In the Greco-Roman sphere there are also traditions of human beings being able to be taken up into the divine sphere (e.g., Romulus, Plato, or Augustus).

That the concern is with a distinct conception is also recognizable in the New Testament statements. Thus, Luke 11.29-30, for example, speaks of the activity of Jesus at the end-time judgment without a statement about his death or resurrection being bound up with this. Rather, it says there that the Son of Man will be a sign for this generation as the repentance preacher Jonah was for the inhabitants of Nineveh. With this there is a forward pointer to the future activity of Jesus as the Son of Man in the judgment. The taking away of Jesus is also spoken of in Mark 2.20 ("Days will come when the groom is taken away from them"), without his death having to be specifically mentioned. As a third example, reference may be made to 1 Tim 3.16:

> He was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit;
> appeared among the angels, proclaimed among the nations;
> believed on in the world, taken up into glory

This old Christ hymn speaks of the exaltation and not the resurrection of Jesus. This corresponds here to his being "revealed in the flesh." Thus, the schema "appeared among human beings—exaltation to God" is shown to be an old christological model that must be distinguished from that of the resurrection.

The complex around the exaltation then includes statements that affirm the divine authority of Jesus and thus pave the way for the doctrine of the two natures formulated in the ancient church. Here, one must first mention the sitting at the right hand of God expressed with the help of Ps 110.1. The psalm verse runs, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

As the frequent use of this verse in the New Testament shows, in primitive Christianity it was related very early to the exaltation of Jesus. It occurs as a direct quotation in 1 Cor 15.25; Eph 1.20, 22; Mark 12.36-37; Heb 1.13; Acts 2.34-35, and allusions are also found in Rom 8.34; Col 3.1; Heb 1.3; 8.1; 1 Pet 3.22; Mark 14.62. There is also mention of the exaltation to the right hand of God in Acts 2.33; 5.31; 7.55-56; Heb 12.2.

This psalm verse is thus the decisive scriptural proof for the exaltation of Jesus and his sitting at the right hand of God.

The tradition of the exaltation of Jesus also includes Jesus' designations of majesty as "Lord" and "Son of God." The designation "Lord" occurs in early confession statements, for example, in Rom 10.9, cited above ("The Traditions about the Resurrection and the Empty Tomb"), and in 1 Cor 8.6 and 12.3. In another early text cited by Paul in Phil 2.6-11, "Lord" is the name that is given to Jesus after his exaltation. In 1 Cor 16.22 and then also in *Didache* 10.6, we encounter the prayer exclamation "Maranatha": "Our Lord, come." In this prayer petition there is a looking ahead to the coming Lord.

"Lord" is an expression that was used in religious context for calling upon the gods and also in the imperial cult: gods and goddesses, and also rulers, could be called upon as "Lord." When the designation was applied to Jesus in early Christianity, this brought to expression the worship of the exalted Lord as a being with divine authority. In this way Jesus is awarded a singular majesty and dignity that reaches beyond those of other rulers and divine beings. Therefore, one can even describe the application of the designation "Lord" to Jesus as the "mythical foundation logos of the Christ cult."[7]

By contrast, outside of this confession tradition, namely in the early Jesus tradition, Lord is always used as a polite address, thus not in a religious sense. Luke and then later also the *Gospel of Peter* presuppose the designation of majesty for Jesus and apply it against this background to the earthly Jesus in narrative passages.

A second designation of majesty in this connection is "Son of God." As with "Lord"—and unlike with "Son of Man" and "Christ"—the concern is with a designation that was first applied to Jesus after Easter, which is attested not only in the Jewish sphere. With the expression "Son of God" the exclusive nearness of Jesus to God was above all expressed.[8] Early statements in the New Testament about Jesus as the Son of God are Rom 1.4 (Jesus was appointed Son of God through the resurrection from the dead); 1 Thess 1.10 (the Son of God is expected from heaven; he will deliver us from the coming wrath of God); and Gal 4.4 (when the time was fulfilled, God sent his Son). Thus, the early statements about Jesus as the Son of God refer to his installation in the position of power at the side of God or to his sending. In the Gospels the confession of Jesus as the Son of God is sketched into the portrayal of his way: at his baptism Jesus receives the Spirit and is designated by God as his Son, which is confirmed once more in the transfiguration of Jesus in the face of the first Passion prediction (Mark 9.7) and placed in the mouth of the pagan centurion under the cross (Mark 15.39). In Luke 1.32 the son whom Mary will bear is even already called "Son of the Highest" in the announcement of his birth. Thus, the confession of Jesus as the Son of God installed in power also shapes the portrayal of his earthly way: as the Son of God, Jesus is the bearer of God's Spirit, he has power over the demons, and he establishes the kingdom of God against that of Satan. With this it becomes clear once again that the Gospels portray the way of Jesus from the perspective of the early Christian confession of him as the Son of God who has been resurrected and installed in a divine position of power.

The statements about Jesus' preexistence and his mediation of creation are located in the environment of the notion of exaltation. With these statements—in correspondence with the extension of the way of Jesus "forward," namely beyond his death—the way of Jesus is now also extended "backward," namely into the time before his birth: Jesus was not merely installed in a divine position of power after his death;

he was also already with God before his coming into the world and is therefore different from human beings in his nature. Important texts that express the notion of preexistence are, for example, Col 1.15-17 and the prologue of John, in which it says that the "Word" was with God in the beginning—what is meant is: at the origin of all that comes into being, thus even before the creation of the world—and indeed that the Word itself was God and came as God into the world and became flesh. These statements go furthest in the direction of the later teaching of the juxtaposition of the two natures in Christ.

The statement of the mediation of creation can be added to the statement of preexistence. If Jesus was already with God from the very beginning, then he also participated in the creation of the world. God creates the world through Christ, thus he makes use of him as a mediating being. This notion is spoken of in John 1.3; 1 Cor 8.6; Col 1.16; and Heb 1.2. As a preexistent being, Jesus exists "before Abraham was" (John 8.58); as the Son who always existed with God, he was sent by God into the world (Gal 4.4).

With these ideas we are already quite far from the activity of the earthly Jesus. For this reason, we will stop here. It is clear: with the complex around the exaltation, primitive Christianity also surrounded the person of Jesus with an aura of interpretations that could have an effect on the portrayal of his earthly activity. This will be summarized once again in the next section.

## Summary

In this chapter two thematic complexes have been considered that possess fundamental significance for the emergence of faith in Jesus Christ: the complex around the resurrection, empty tomb, and appearances of Jesus, and the complex around his exaltation, his sitting at the right hand of God, his preexistence, and his mediation of creation. One can designate this process as a development from an "implicit" Christology with its basis in Jesus himself to a post-Easter *explicit* Christology: through his extraordinary activity—his healing of those who were possessed and sick, his founding of a fellowship of followers, his talk of the reign of God dawning in his activity, his self-designation as "Son of Man" through whose presence God could be

directly experienced—impulses went forth from Jesus himself that led people, already during the time of his earthly activity, to see in him a person who acted in divine authority and to bring into connection with him the expectations formulated in the Scriptures concerning the action of God at the end of time.

The death of Jesus did not destroy these convictions. It even proved to be a creative impulse to develop them and to view the way and nature of Jesus in fundamental dimensions. Jesus' conviction that God acted through him was connected with faith in his resurrection, which also extended this action beyond his death. Jesus' expectation that he would enter into the reign of God was connected with faith in his exaltation, which awarded to him a unique position of dignity in the time until his return. Jesus, the Son of Man, became, with recourse to the book of Daniel, the one whose return was expected at the end of time; Jesus, the Lord, became the one who sits at the right hand of God and whom one calls upon in prayer; Jesus, the Son of God, became the one enthroned in power who preserves from the coming wrath. These convictions then also shaped the portrayals of his earthly activity. The confession of Jesus as the Anointed One and the Son of God was connected with his earthly activity; his birth was already understood to be brought about by God and accompanied by extraordinary proceedings; his way ended neither at the cross nor in the tomb but at the right hand of God. Finally, the Gospel of John even places the way of Jesus in the wide-reaching framework of a way that begins with God and leads back to him again.

Picking up on what was said at the beginning of this book, it thus becomes clear that these convictions are fundamental for the primitive Christian perception of who Jesus "really" was. Here, "really" does not mean, of course, a Jesus reconstructed with the tools of historical criticism. As important as the historical-critical analysis of the Jesus tradition is in order to attain a responsible conception of Jesus in today's time, such an analysis does not lead behind the sources and thus come nearer to Jesus. Even if we differentiate more clearly between "historical" and "legendary" motifs in the age of historical criticism than the authors of the Gospels did, Jesus also obtains meaning in our time only when we sketch him into our view of reality and history. Whether or not we take up the early Christian interpretations of Jesus as the Risen and Exalted One is not a question of greater objectivity,

let alone truth. Rather, what is decisive is whether in the light of the findings drawn out in a historical-critical manner these interpretations appear plausible and, from a hermeneutical perspective, fruitful in order to explore the meaning of Jesus. With this we already find ourselves at the transition to the final chapter of this book, in which some of the effects that have gone forth from Jesus will be discussed.

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# 14

# Spotlights on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Jesus

A Google search for the keyword "Jesus" yields 540,000,000 results, and there are in addition 182,000,000 results for "Jesus Christ" (accessed on August 8, 2013). Very different material, of course, is hidden behind this immense number: there is a mixed bag here from references to serious Jesus books and conferences via announcements of supposedly new insights to curious, pseudo-religious offers. It is conspicuous here that the engagement with Jesus has noticeably increased in the last years. In their Christmas and Easter editions, magazines such as *Der Spiegel* (The Mirror), *Stern* (Star), and *Focus* are devoted in an almost traditional manner to a Jesus theme—which sometimes even succeeds. Jesus is also a theme in literature, film, theater, and the fine arts. In this phenomenon one can presumably see an increased sensibility for the religious dimension of reality. Encounters with other religions such as Islam also sharpen the question of Christianity's own identity and religious socialization. Thus, the impact of Christianity is in no way restricted to the sphere of the Christian churches. Jesus is, at least in the European and North American sphere, a culture-shaping entity.

Reference was already made at the beginning of this book to some examples of this culture-shaping power of the Jesus figure. This will be pursued in somewhat greater detail in what follows. It is clear from

the outset that it can be here only a matter of a tour de force through time and space in which the traveler gets to see only a tiny extract. This sketch, however, will be configured in such a way that an impression of the whole emerges. We begin with a topic that is of central significance for the view of Jesus and the effects that have gone forth from him since the beginnings of Christianity: the question of whether or how Jesus could be God and a human being at the same time.

## True Human Being and True God? Baudolino and the Controversies about the Nature of Jesus in Early Christianity

In his novel *Baudolino* Umberto Eco portrays the search of the novel's hero, Baudolino, a farmer's son from Alessandria in Piedmont, and his companions for the legendary kingdom of the priest-king John, which supposedly lies to the east of the regions inhabited by human beings. After leaving the known parts of the earth, the small group reaches a region in which various peculiar beings live: skiapods ("shade foots"), who have only one leg with a foot that is large enough that the skiapods extend it upward when lying down in order to find shade under it; blemmyae, who have neither head nor neck, whose eyes sit where human beings have nipples, and whose mouth opening found beneath constantly changes to another form in correspondence to the sound that it emits; panotians, whose ears reach to their knees and serve as a coat for them when it is cold; pygmies, who are clothed with only a loincloth; ponces, who do not have knee joints and therefore strut stiffly on horse hoofs and whose genitals are found on their chest; nubians, also called "Circumcellions," who are good fighters and always immediately seek martyrdom;[1] and in addition giants, tongueless beings, and eunuchs.[2]

This bizarre collection of highly strange creatures becomes even more peculiar to Baudolino and his companions through the fact that the variety of their outer forms corresponds to an equally diverse range of teachings about God and Jesus Christ advocated by them: skiapods and blemmyae teach that the Father and the Son are different in nature, but skiapods say that the Son was adopted by the Father, whereas the blemmyae are of the opinion that the Son is the Logos

and the Logos only appeared to become flesh. The panotians advocate the teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father and not also from the Son. The pygmies, by contrast, think exactly the opposite, namely that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Son and not also from the Father. The giants are sheep and cattle shepherds and celebrate communion with bread and cheese because they believe that Jesus transformed bread and cheese at the Last Supper.[3] The tongueless beings live outside the city and have neither sacraments nor worship services. They do not work but hope to enter heaven through unbroken prayer. Finally, the eunuchs teach that not only the Son but also God the Father himself was crucified.

Despite the variety of their confessions the monsters live in peace with one another. While they do consider the views of the respectively different groups to be fundamentally wrong, they are nevertheless of the opinion that all are good Christians and faithful servants of the Deacon and Presbyter.[4] For Baudolino and his companions, however, the subtle theological differences between the groups are dubious. For them it has always been more important to know "which Pope was the real one, and which the antipope"; everything else is "a question for Greeklings," as one of the companions of Baudolino observes.[5]

Eco's bizarre scenario is a postmodern play with the variety of christological views that he contrasts with the group around Baudolino that is oriented to the Pope: the christological positions that were developed in ancient Christianity live on in the world of the monsters. But in contrast to the reality of the controversies in the ancient church, they exist peacefully in the world of the priest-king John and have even obtained bodily form in the monsters. In what follows we will delve deeper into the significance of the scene through a consideration of the early Christian controversies around the nature of Jesus Christ.

The question of whether—or in what way—it can be said of Jesus that he was simultaneously a human being and God was placed before the early church by the confessions and narratives of the New Testament. On the one hand, there are high christological texts that speak of Jesus as the divine Logos and the preexistent mediator of creation; on the other hand, there are narratives of the Galilean itinerant preacher who went through villages, ate and drank, suffered under fear and loneliness, and was executed on a cross. How can this tension

between the human being and the divine being, between "Jesus" and "Christ," be expressed in such a way that both sides are simultaneously preserved? This question was not merely of fundamental importance for ancient Christianity. It is fundamental for the Christianity of all times, for in the confession "Jesus (is the) Christ" the basic message of Christianity comes to expression, namely the union of God and human being in Jesus of Nazareth.

The ancient church theologians occupied themselves for a long time with how the one, perfect and transcendent God and the crucified human being Jesus Christ could be thought together in one person. The question has lost nothing of its relevance up to the present, even if the parameters in which it is discussed have changed time and again in the course of the history of Christianity. The explosiveness of the discussion is not surprising: how the unity and difference of God, the Father, and God, the Son, can be equally expressed, without introducing the notion of two gods, and how, in addition, the loftiness of the divine nature and the crucifixion of Jesus can be brought together are highly complex theological questions on whose answer fundamental matters depend for a faith that is intellectually accountable. In the second and early third centuries, Justin and Origen used the philosophical notion of the Logos who proceeds from God and is active through God in the world. This was undoubtedly an attractive model for explaining the union of God and Jesus Christ, but it could not yet satisfactorily explain the difficult christological problems. How could, thus one asked, it be said of Jesus, if he was, in truth, God, that he suffered and died? Is it not the necessary consequence of the confession of his divine nature to understand his suffering as suffering that affected only his human side, while not touching his divine nature? The notion that the Father himself suffered and was crucified (the so-called "patripassianism") appeared incompatible with the preservation of the dignity and loftiness of God. Therefore, they insisted that a difference between the Father and the Son must be held fast to. Others objected that the unity and uniqueness of God may not be violated by allowing the confession of the divinity of the Son to call into question the one, indivisible origin (Greek: *archê*) of the divine being. Therefore, Father and Son are to be viewed, so it was said, as different modes of appearing (*modi*) of the one God and not as two distinct beings. Others argued again that equally ascribing

divinity and humanity to Jesus would result in the need to distinguish between a side of Jesus that was to be worshipped and a side of Jesus that was not to be worshiped because it was human, which was said to be absurd. Therefore, they wanted to speak only of *one* divine nature of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they were designated as "Monophysites" (*monos* = only, single; *physis* = nature) by their opponents, a term that then entered into the dogmatic terminology. Their position was clearly formulated by Apollinaris of Laodicea (ca. 315–ca. 390), who assumed "one nature of the God-Logos that became flesh."

The opposing position to the Monophysite teaching was advocated most clearly by Arius (ca. 260–ca. 336). According to his view, the Logos is not co-equal in nature with God, and is also not co-eternal. Rather, he was created at a certain point by God as a perfect being. His position, although it was intensely fought against in the ancient church, was also oriented toward preserving the uniqueness of God and simultaneously holding fast to the distinctness of Jesus, who also was by no means merely an ordinary creature according to Arius.

Attempts were repeatedly made to resolve the problems that came to light in the different positions through more precise conceptual differentiations, for example, by distinguishing between the one divine being (in the Latin sphere: the one divine substance) and the three ways (Latin: persons) in which they existed. The formulation that was finally found at the Council of Chalcedon stated that Jesus Christ was "truly God and truly human being," "of the same being (*homoousios*) with the Father according to divinity and simultaneously of the same being with us according to humanity," and that in him the two natures existed "unmixed, unchanged, undivided, and unseparated."

The problems, however, were also not thereby resolved. Rather, the formulation of Chalcedon came closer to declaring impossible an exact specification of the simultaneous divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. This is already indicated by the fact that the relation of the two natures in the formula of Chalcedon was demarcated in the first instance against views that were regarded as heretical. Thus, one especially wanted to say how the relation may *not* be described. Moreover, the formulation points to the fact that the underlying christological tension cannot be resolved with the help of dogmatic formulations. Therefore, it brings us further to understand it as a *productive* tension that time and again challenges its interpreters in changed

constellations to bring the core of the Christian faith to expression. Here, the christological discussions of the ancient church mark out the borders within which every engagement with this question must move: the significance of Jesus can be grasped only when his activity is brought into connection with the action of God; at the same time, it is adequately brought to expression only when the humanity of Jesus is taken seriously.

Some churches have not accepted the confession of Chalcedon. "Monophysite" confessions that split from the imperial church emerged above all in Syria and Egypt. In Eco's parable they turn up in the form of the eunuchs. Other views condemned as heretical are also encountered—for example, the views of the docetists in the blemmyae.

Eco's portrayal is extremely stimulating for the discussion around the doctrine of the two natures: it challenges one to perceive various accentuations as contributions to a living discussion concerning the nature and meaning of the Christian confession, and thus as riches of the Christian faith rather than dividing them prematurely into "orthodox" and "heretical" positions—even if the peaceful-postmodern monster world probably ultimately remain overly lacking in profile. It then also follows from this that the Christian faith must constantly grapple with the fundamental questions of its confession and their mediation with the respectively current understandings of reality. This undoubtedly includes the question of the simultaneous divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

## The Apocryphal Jesus: At the Margins of "Official" Christianity

Under the rubric of "apocryphal Jesus" we will summarize portrayals that legendarily embellish the narratives about Jesus and supplement them with additional stories. This process already begins in the New Testament itself—for example in the narratives about Mary visiting Elizabeth or the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple. It then continues via the apocryphal ancient and medieval narratives and finds a correspondence in novelistic reworkings of the Jesus figure in modernity. Therefore, by "apocryphal Jesus" we do not mean only

the Jesus of the ancient Christian apocrypha. Nevertheless, we begin with these writings because they represent a distinct engagement with Jesus that is located beyond the New Testament.[6]

The ancient Christian "apocrypha" include a great number of writings of very different character: gospels, acts of apostles, apocalypses, letters, prayers, fragments with sayings or episodes from the life of Jesus, and other material. These writings never belonged to a common collection, for example, after the manner of the New Testament. Rather, their commonality consists in the fact that they further develop the New Testament tradition in various ways and often interpret it in a legendary, mythological, or philosophical manner. Jesus' childhood and the Passion and Easter narratives are the preferred stations for such embellishment.

The so-called *Protevangelium* ("first gospel") *of James* can be mentioned as an example of an "infancy gospel." This writing, which arose in the second century and is actually called "Birth of Mary," already contained a second part—namely, "Revelation of James" (the brother of Jesus is meant)—in antiquity. By contrast, the third part that is common today was first added to it in the sixteenth century. The writing was extremely beloved in the Eastern Church in particular, as is attested by the great number of preserved manuscripts and translations: more than 140 manuscripts exist in the original language of Greek as well as translations, for example, into Syriac, Armenian, and Coptic. Only a few fragments of a Latin translation have been preserved. The reason for this is that in the question of the siblings of Jesus the writing represented the predominant view of the Eastern Church, according to which the concern was with children of Joseph from a first marriage. By contrast, the predominant view of the Western Church said that the concern was with cousins of Jesus.

In its first part the *Protevangelium of James* narrates the birth of Mary. Her parents, Anna and Joachim, lament their childlessness, and after that an angel of the Lord announces to Anna that her prayer for a child has been heard and Mary is born. Some narratives from the childhood of Mary follow the encounter with Joseph, which is brought about by a sign of God. The following chapters represent a combination of the birth stories from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that has been embellished by further reports. Here, it is emphasized that Mary also remained a virgin after the birth. At the end it

is reported that Herod's murder of the children also entailed a danger for John the Baptist and his father Zacharias dies as a martyr.

Thus, the *Protevangelium of James* is above all interested in the figure of Mary.[7] Here, we encounter the parents of Mary for the first time. While the motif of the "immaculate conception of Mary" is not yet clearly articulated, it is already laid out: Mary appears as the "new Eve," who as a pious virgin was already chosen before her birth to give birth to Jesus. The purity and piety of Mary, who grows up in the temple, are emphasized in an exaggerated manner through the use of Old Testament motifs. The writing is thus an early witness for the veneration of Mary. With regard to the activity of Jesus it is of interest because it reveals the legendary expansion of the circumstances of his birth and attests the emphasis on the virgin birth that is increasingly perceptible from the second century onward.

The infancy gospels also include the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, whose basic content also presumably reaches back into the second century. Various legends about Jesus as a child who performs miracles (e.g., making clay birds fly or causing a boy who bumps into his shoulder to drop dead) are narrated. With recourse to mythological and legendary motifs, Jesus is described here as already equipped with supernatural miraculous powers as a child. This tendency toward legendary embellishment continues in later infancy gospels.

The writings that have grown up around the Passion and Easter events and that give accounts of conversations immediately before the Passion, special revelations through the Risen One, or visions that are mediated through heavenly journeys, include the *Gospel of Mary,* mentioned in chapter 3, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the so-called *Unknown Berlin Gospel*, as well as the *Gospel of Judas*, which has only recently become known. Some of these writings reflect controversies and conflicts of authority within formative Christianity. This is already shown by the appeal to certain authorities—for example, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and James—who are introduced as guarantors of the respective traditions and authorize the teaching mediated in the writing. Here, the teaching of Jesus is often interspersed with mythological or philosophical elements and detached from its original historical connections.

For the most part, the "apocryphal" gospels do not expand the historical knowledge about Jesus. Rather, they show developments

that took place at the "margins" of Christianity apart from the formulation of dogmatic teachings and confessions and the formation of institutional structures. They are therefore important witnesses for a history of Christianity that also wishes to consider what lies to the side of the main lines of theology and church. They show first how a "popular piety" arose in Christianity that was interested in stories about Jesus beyond the reports of the Gospels, which were sometimes rather meager. This interest had always existed in Christianity—starting from the ancient infancy gospels via the medieval legends of the saints down to the novelistic Jesus portrayals of the nineteenth century. At present this function has been taken over, for example, by a "Christmas piety," which gains expression, for instance, in nativity plays or other forms of the demonstration of the Christmas message. Here too the concern is not with a historical interpretation but with making Jesus come alive and often with a folksy establishment of immediacy.

This function is taken over second, and in a less welcome manner, by sensationalizing books or magazine articles that appear in the age of historical criticism in the guise of academic theses that supposedly cause the history of Christianity to appear in a completely new light. The palette ranges here from fantastic theses on Qumran to no less daring speculations about the historical value of the apocryphal gospels.[8] Here, historical seriousness and the formation of legends are sometimes confused with each other in a questionable way.

An additional significance of the apocryphal gospels resides in the fact that they sharpen our view for what the church based itself on in its interpretation of the activity and fate of Jesus and thereby simultaneously reveal the boundaries over against interpretations that were not accepted. This drawing of boundaries pertained, for example, to the so-called "docetic" Christology, which said that Jesus only appeared to have suffered, whereas his true nature was not touched by suffering and death. Thus, this line of thought resolved the question of the two natures of Jesus through a superordination of his divine nature. Writings that advocated such a view—or that were used by the "Docetists" to confirm their view—were rejected by the early church as "heretical." An example of this is the *Gospel of Peter*, which was rejected by Bishop Serapion of Antioch because it was said to be a forgery and used by Docetists.

Thus, the apocryphal gospels show first a legendary embellishment of the life of Jesus, which already begins in the New Testament itself, and they point second to interpretations of Jesus that were judged as no longer compatible with the Christian confession. The value and limits of the apocryphal portrayals thus lie in the vivid, sometimes moving or provocative narratives about Jesus. In this respect they can certainly be stimulating and can challenge one to uncommon perspectives on the Jesus figure. At the same time, such portrayals must always be examined with a view to whether they correspond to the standards of academic and ethical seriousness.

## Advent and Christmas: The Arrival of the Savior

There are two stations in the life of Jesus that are connected with an especially intensive *Wirkungsgeschichte*: his birth and his death. Here, the historical findings are not the deciding factor. With respect to the birth, the historical findings are extremely scanty, and his suffering and death also do not belong at the center of the effects that have gone forth from Jesus from the beginning because of the historical data but because of the significance that people have seen in it. The elevated meaning of the beginning and the end of the earthly life of Jesus can already be recognized in the so-called Apostles' Creed, where the two are mentioned immediately next to each other: "born of the virgin Mary—suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried." Therefore, in this section and the next we will deal with these two stations in somewhat greater detail.

From an early time onward a distinct aura was formed around the birth of Jesus. As already mentioned, the birth stories of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are the first witnesses of this, and the *Protevangelium of James,* discussed in the last section, develops this line further.

The tradition of the virgin birth, which emerged early, plays an important role here. It takes up the notion of a divine origin of extraordinary human beings, which was broadly attested in antiquity. This notion actually has a pagan origin, but it is applied to Jesus against the background of Isaiah's prophecy about a virgin who becomes pregnant. For this the Hebrew text, which speaks only of a

"young woman," is interpreted with the help of the notion of a "virgin birth," which actually comes from the Greco-Roman sphere. Despite the polemic from the pagan and Jewish sides, which already began early,[9] the virgin birth was upheld. It essentially remained uncontested within Christianity until the nineteenth century and was understood as an expression of the special, divine origin of Jesus. It would, of course, be absurd to want to defend the virgin birth today as a biological fact. Rather, the significance of this tradition can be captured only by placing it in the broader context of comparable ancient narratives about miraculous births. It then becomes clear that it belongs to the motifs with the help of which Jesus' distinctiveness and divinity were portrayed. That the early Christian authors made use of a motif that was offered to them by the cultural milieu of their time for this is natural.

Another motif of this sort is the placement of the birth of Jesus on December 25. This is securely attested for the middle of the fourth century. The older tradition, however, is the celebration of the birth of Jesus, together with that of the appearance of the magi from the east (cf. Matt 2.1-12), on the festival of Epiphany (January 6). After the celebration of the birth was moved, this became the festival of the baptism of Jesus. The reason for the choice of December 25 was that for this day, the day of the winter solstice, the festival of the sun god Sol Invictus was introduced, which had been an official Roman state festival since 275 CE. Since the sun symbolism was also used in a Christian way—which has been preserved up to the present, for example, in songs such as "Sonne der Gerechtigkeit" (Sun of Righteousness) and "O Jesu Christe, wahres Licht" (O Jesus Christ, True Light)—the celebration of his birth in competition with the pagan worship of the sun was suggested. In addition, the liturgical custom of a time of fasting prior to the time of Christmas in which one prepared for the arrival (the *adventus*) of Christ already arose in the fourth century.

Even after the rise of historical criticism of the Bible, the fact that the actual date and circumstances of the birth of Jesus elude historical investigation has also not at all altered the fact that Christmas has become the most important festival in Western culture. This is an impressive example of the fact that historical criticism and the aura that has emerged around Jesus often move on different levels: when

Christianity celebrates the arrival of the Savior of the world, this presupposes the interpretations of the activity of Jesus by the Gospels and the ancient Christian Christology and yet also the embellishment through additional legendary elements (e.g., ox and donkey at the manger, which are first mentioned in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which probably comes from the seventh century). This will be illustrated with the help of some theological accents in Advent and Christmas songs.

The Latin hymn "Veni Redemptor Gentium" by Bishop Ambrose of Milan from the fourth century, which Martin Luther translated into German under the title "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland" (Come Now, Savior of the Gentiles) and which was variously set to music, for example by Johann Sebastian Bach, both for choirs and as an instrumental piece, will serve as a first example. In the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* (Protestant Hymnbook) five of the original eight strophes of this song are found under the number 4. We will discuss this song in somewhat greater detail because christological convictions can be shown in the hymn that were taken up as an absolute given by Martin Luther and with which the Christian community agrees today when it sings this song in the Advent and Christmas period.

Clearly recognizable developments of the early Christology have found expression in the hymn. Thus, Jesus is designated as "Savior" (or "Redeemer") of all non-Jewish peoples—this is how the Latin *gentes* should be understood here—who join the covenant of God with Israel. The song then takes up in an intensive way the christological discourse of the third and fourth centuries. It emphasizes the true incarnation of the Word of God (strophe 2) and simultaneously his unity of nature with God (strophe 6). Furthermore, there is a clear confession of the virgin birth (strophes 1 and 3). Finally, the way of Christ is described in a comprehensive manner as coming from the Father and returning again to him (strophes 4 and 5). The *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* lacks strophes 2, 3, and 6, which were still present, of course, for Luther. This is evidently intended to retract the accent on the virgin birth—which appears questionable, however, in the case of an ancient or late medieval text. It is difficult to understand why strophe 6, which stresses Jesus' unity of nature with God, was left out.

| *German Text* | *Literal English Translation* |
|---|---|
| 1. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland,<br>der Jungfrauen Kind erkannt,<br>dass sich wunder alle Welt,<br>Gott solch Geburt ihm bestellt | 1. Now come, Savior of the Gentiles,<br>child of the virgin recognized,<br>that all the world may wonder,<br>such a birth for him God appointed |
| 2. Nicht von Manns Blut noch von Fleisch<br>allein von dem heiligen Geist<br>ist Gottes Wort worden ein Mensch<br>und blüht ein Frucht Weibs Fleisch. | 2. Not from man's blood nor from flesh<br>alone from the Holy Spirit<br>has God's word become a human being<br>and blossoms a fruit of woman's flesh |
| 3. Der Jungfrau Leib schwanger ward,<br>doch bleibt Keuschheit rein bewahrt;<br>leucht' herfür manch Tugend schon,<br>Gott da war in seinem Thron. | 3. The virgin's body became pregnant,<br>but her chastity remained kept pure;<br>shined forth many virtues already,<br>God was there on his throne. |
| 4. Er ging aus der Kammer sein,<br>dem königlichen Saal so rein,<br>Gott von Art und Mensch, ein Held;<br>Sein' Weg er zu laufen eilt. | 4. He went forth from his chamber,<br>The kingly hall so pure,<br>God by nature and human being, a hero;<br>He hastens to run his way. |
| 5. Sein Lauf kam vom Vater her<br>Und kehrt wieder zum Vater,<br>fuhr hinunter zu der Höll<br>und wieder zu Gottes Stuhl. | 5. His course came from the Father<br>and returns again to the Father,<br>led down to hell<br>and again to God's chair |
| 6. Der du bist dem Vater gleich,<br>führt hinaus den Sieg im Fleisch,<br>dass dein ewig Gotts Gewalt<br>in uns das krank Fleisch enthalt. | 6. You who are equal to the Father,<br>carry out the victory in the flesh,<br>that your eternal divine power<br>in us the sick flesh sustain. |
| 7. Dein Krippen glänzt hell und klar,<br>die Nacht gibt ein neu Licht dar,<br>Dunkel muss nicht kommen drein,<br>der Glaub bleib immer im Schein. | 7. Your crib shines bright and clear,<br>the night gives a new light<br>darkness must not come in,<br>faith remains always shining. |
| 8. Lob sei Gott dem Vater g'tan;<br>Lob sei Gott dem ein'gen Sohn,<br>Lob sei Gott dem heilgen Geist<br>Immer und in Ewigkeit. | 8. Praise be to God the Father;<br>praise be to God the only Son,<br>praise be to God the Holy Spirit<br>always and into eternity |

Some songs make a link between the Christmas message and the message of the Passion or Easter. This is the case, for example, in the song "Es kommt ein Schiff, geladen bis an sein' höchsten Bord"

(There Comes a Ship, Loaded to Its Highest Board), which was composed in 1626 by the Strassburg pastor Daniel Sudermann and goes back to a text of the medieval mystic John Tauler. The first four strophes thematize first the birth of Jesus. Over against Tauler's text, which spoke of the incarnation of God, Sudermann placed a stronger accent on the Christmas event through the addition of what is now the fourth strophe.

| *German Text* | *Literal English Translation* |
|---|---|
| 1. Es kommt ein Schiff, geladen<br>bis an sein höchsten Bord.<br>Es trägt den Sohn des Vaters,<br>das ewigliche Wort.<br><br>2. Das Schiff, das geht so stille.<br>Es trägt so teure Last:<br>Der Segel ist die Mynne,<br>der heilige Geist der Mast.<br><br>3. Der Anker ist ausgeworfen,<br>das Schiff, das geht an Land.<br>Gott ist Mensche worden,<br>der Sohn ist uns gesandt.<br><br>4. Zu Bethlehem geboren<br>im Stall ein Kindelein,<br>gibt sich für uns verloren,<br>gelobet muss es sein. | 1. There comes a ship, loaded<br>up to its highest board.<br>It bears the Son of the Father,<br>the eternal word.<br><br>2. The ship, it goes so quietly.<br>It bears such a costly load:<br>The sail is love,<br>the Holy Spirit is the mast.<br><br>3. The anchor has been cast out,<br>the ship, it goes on land.<br>God has become human being,<br>The Son has been sent to us.<br><br>4. Born in Bethlehem<br>in the stable a little child,<br>gives itself for us lost ones,<br>praised it must be. |

The last two strophes, of which the second was again composed by Sudermann himself, then emphasize that suffering and death also belong to the fellowship with this child:

| | |
|---|---|
| 5. Und wer dies Kind mit Freuden<br>Umfangen, küssen will,<br>muss vorher mit ihm leiden<br>groß Pein und Marter viel,<br><br>6. danach mit ihm auch sterben<br>und geistlich auferstehn,<br>das ewig Leben erben,<br>wie an ihm ist geschehen | 5. And whoever this child with joy<br>wishes to embrace, to kiss,<br>must beforehand suffer with him<br>great pain and torture much,<br><br>6. thereafter die with him too<br>and rise spiritually,<br>eternal life inherit<br>as happened with him |

Thus, the themes of the song are the incarnation of the Son of God and the union with him in suffering and death, which then also leads to the reception of eternal life—a typical theme of mysticism.

Themes from Christmas and the Passion are connected in an especially forceful way in the song "Die Nacht ist vorgedrungen" (The Night Is Far Gone), which was composed by Johann Klepper and set to music by the Thüringen church musician Johannes Petzold. Klepper's song is interspersed with allusions to biblical texts. The formulations "the night is far gone," "the bright morning star," "whom all the angels serve," "God himself has appeared," "he will be saved when he trusts the child," "salvation came to you from the face of God," and many others take up biblical expressions and thereby bind the text closely to the biblical tradition.

The song is also an impressive witness to the influence of Lutheran theology upon Klepper: the basic message is the coming of God (God himself has appeared—the name of Jesus never appears) to redeem human beings from their guilt. The song paints a picture of the world immersed in the darkness of its sins, whose night is now in the process of disappearing (cf. especially Rom 13.11-14). The Christmas message of the arrival of the Savior makes itself felt here in only a muffled form. There is no exhortation to rejoice, no joyful reception of the child with open arms and doors is described, but rather a night that will be followed by many more nights ("Still many a night will fall on human suffering and guilt"), which, however, stands henceforth under the promise of the God who mercifully receives the sinner.

Klepper's song clearly distinguishes itself from songs that celebrate the entrance of Jesus as king into Jerusalem ("Macht hoch die Tür, die Tor macht weit" [Make High the Door, the Gate Make Wide] and take up Israel's expectations for the future Davidide ("Töchter Zion, freue dich" [Rejoice, Daughters of Zion]. Thus, on the basis of the theological messages of Advent and Christmas songs, different accentuations can be recognized in the interpretation of the Christmas message as the arrival of the Savior of the world.

## Good Friday and Easter: Suffering and Comfort upon the Face of God

In a similar way as with the birth of Jesus, a dense field of interpretations has established itself around his suffering, death, and resurrection. Here, two manifestations can be distinguished. On the one side there is an intense Passion piety, which finds expression, for example, in Passion plays, in the setting of the Passion story to music (e.g., the "Sieben Worten Jesu am Kreuz" [The Seven Words of Jesus on the Cross], by Heinrich Schütz; Passion chorales such as "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" [O Head Full of Blood and Wounds]; and the great works of the *St. Matthew Passion* and the *St. John Passion* by Johann Sebastian Bach, which connect biblical texts in recitations together with arias and chorales), and in woodcuttings and paintings. On the other side there is the celebration of the resurrection at Easter, the oldest festival of Christianity. Although the two are naturally closely connected, distinct developments can be recognized with regard to their *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

In the interpretations of the Passion story, the enormity of Jesus' suffering—including the suffering that his death entailed for his mother—always played a central role. This found classic expression in numerous Pietà portrayals, which show the face of Jesus' mother marked by suffering, who holds her dead son in her arms.

We will select three outstanding portrayals that have artistically treated the theme of the suffering or dead Christ:

1. *Appendix Figures A.2 and A.3*: The *Pietà* from the Ursuline monastery at Erfurt (ca. 1320/30) is among the most impressive medieval portrayals of the suffering of Mary with the dead Christ in her arms. The incomprehensible pain of the mother who holds on her knees her son, on whom the wounds from the execution are clear to see, is almost a symbol for the suffering of the world, which has taken form in an unsurpassable way in the death of Jesus.
2. *Appendix Figures A.4 and A.5*: The famous crucifixion scene of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* is by Matthias Grünewald (actually Mathis Gothart Nithart). The altar was created from 1512 to 1516 for the Antonite cloister in Isenheim in Alsace. Today it

can be seen in the Unterlinden Museum at Colmar in Alsace. It is a retable: the middle picture shows the crucifixion scene in the closed position; to the left and the right there are portrayals of Saint Sebastian and Anthony; the burial scene is below the crucifixion scene.

The portrayal of the crucifixion is concentrated on the tortured, thorn-covered body of Jesus, whose facial expression is marked by the pain of death. To the left of Jesus stands Mary, clothed in a white mantle that presumably symbolizes her virginity, together with the Beloved Disciple, who holds her in his arms. To the right stands John the Baptist, who points to the Crucified One, and at his feet there is a lamb bearing a cross as a symbol of Christ, whose blood flows into a cup—a symbol for the Eucharist. Behind him one can read in red letters the saying from John 3.30 in Latin: *Illum oportet crescere me autem minui* ("He must increase but I must decrease"). Mary Magdalene kneels directly under the cross, and at her feet stands a vessel for anointing. Especially due to the forceful portrayal of the maltreated body of Jesus on the cross and the expressive gestures of those standing under the cross, the painting is one of the most moving portrayals of the crucifixion scene ever made.

3. *Appendix Figure A.6*: Titian's *Pietà* portrayal dates to 1576. Titian's last work is regarded as one of the most significant portrayals of the Passion in European painting. A diagonal that comes down from above and leads to Christ symbolizes the removal from the cross. It is taken up by a diagonal that rises to the right and is reinforced by the torch-bearing boy. This diagonal points to the resurrection. In the dome of the illuminated tomb is found the lightest point of the picture. This too points to the resurrection. Moses and the Sybil stand to the right and the left of the tomb as symbols of the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds. The mourning figures are characterized by their realistic portrayal and their dramatic gestures.

In their own respective ways, these three portrayals bring to expression a central aspect that has led time and again to artistic engagements with the Passion story, namely the limitless solidarity

with human beings that is recognizable in the suffering of Jesus and the pain of his mother. That in the suffering of Jesus God himself has bound himself with the doubt, fear, suffering, and death of human beings is a message that has mediated comfort and assurance to Christians at all times. That the incarnation of God also encompassed suffering and death therefore belongs to the central statements of the Christian faith.

Admittedly, it must also be said that the suffering of Jesus receives much more sparing treatment in the Gospels and receives only a little elaboration. In the Gospel of John the humiliation of Jesus is especially emphasized through the mention of the crown of thorns and the purple mantle as well as the mocking by the soldiers. This, however, functions not to thematize the suffering and pain in their own right but to underline the contrast that the one who is mocked and degraded as "king of the Jews" is, in fact, the true king of Israel who will be exalted through the crucifixion in a paradoxical manner.

Another motif is the overcoming of suffering and death through the resurrection. The middle position of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* (the so-called festival day side) shows on the right side a portrayal of the resurrection in which transfiguration and ascension are simultaneously integrated (fig. A7), and the mourning also stands under the sign of the resurrection in Titian's *Pietà*.

Finally, the human sin that caused the suffering of Jesus is an aspect that is emphasized in medieval mysticism and Lutheran theology. Thus, on the one hand, Paul Gerhard's Passion song "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" (O Head Full of Blood and Wounds) elaborates on the suffering and pain of Jesus in the sense of medieval Passion mysticism (it is based on the medieval hymn "Salve caput cruentatum" [Hail Blood-Bespattered Head]), and on the other hand, it emphasizes the fact that it is human sin that caused this ("Ich hab es selbst verschuldet, was du ertragen hast" [I myself am guilty, for what you have borne]).

Finally, the effects of the Passion story include the fact that the following of Christ could also be extended to the reliving of his suffering. An example of this is the portrayal of the stigmatization of Francis (fig. A.8).

Thus, the engagement with the suffering, dying, and resurrection of Jesus has produced from itself differently accented effects. These too

go far beyond the historical findings and also beyond the narratives of the Gospels. They are—in a similar manner as with the legends around his birth—impressive witnesses to the fact that the story of Jesus has become a "foundation story" that has taken up into itself the suffering, fears, desires, and hopes of human beings. If in the history of Jesus we are dealing not simply with the history of an ordinary human being but with the encounter of God with human beings, then it is also the place at which the decisive questions of human life must find an answer.

## The Sermon on the Mount: Impacts of the Ethos of Jesus

From the sphere of Jesus' activity we select again a significant example in terms of its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. The teaching summarized in the speech that was first designated as "The Sermon on the Mount" (*sermo domini in monte*) by Augustine has influenced the history of Christianity from its beginnings and has had a lasting effect on the manifestations of Christian ethics. Thus, chapters 5 to 7 of the Gospel of Matthew certainly belong to the most influential biblical texts. The ancient church already dealt with this text intensively, and one of the oldest pictorial depictions of Jesus on a relief from the fourth century portrays Jesus as a preacher on the mountain (fig. A.9).

The Sermon on the Mount contains central sayings of Jesus such as the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, and yet also the sharp demands of the antitheses and the instructions not to worry about food and clothing, to give oneself fully to the service of God, and not to hang one's heart on earthly possessions. Therein resides their provocation: when there is a call to committed Christianity, to consistent praxis of the faith, or to the renewal of the church, then the Sermon on the Mount usually plays an important role. For this reason, impulses that have reminded Christianity of its origins in the proclamation of Jesus and called for its preservation have gone forth time and again from Jesus the preacher on the mount. In this spirit Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his brother Karl Bonhoeffer in a 1935 letter, "Here [in the Sermon on the Mount] resides the only source of power that can blow up the whole bag of tricks and specters at once. . . . The

restoration of the church certainly comes from a type of new monasticism, which shares with the old only the uncompromising character of a life according to the Sermon of the Mount in the following of Christ." Bonhoeffer thus evaluates the Sermon on the Mount as one of the most important texts for shaping the church: uncompromising life in the following of Christ is viewed as the decisive impetus from which the church lives and out of which it can renew itself ever again.

The fascination of the Sermon on the Mount rests in the fact that Christianity becomes concrete here: ethical instructions are formulated that allow the Christian message to become vivid and tangible in behavior. Through this Christianity simultaneously becomes binding: those who are poor, hungry, and mourning are declared blessed; one is called upon not to worry about the everyday but to concern oneself with God's kingdom, to love one's enemies, to serve God and not mammon. Such commandments establish standards: in the Sermon on the Mount Christianity appears as a community with a high moral and ethical claim. The Sermon on the Mount thus establishes identity. Here, Christianity receives an ethical guideline that it can appeal to in concrete situations.

At the same time, however, the Sermon on the Mount also gives Christianity a problem: Can its demands be fulfilled—in other words, are we dealing with a general "ethic of Christianity"? Or is its perspective more limited so that it is directed only to a specific situation—for instance the situation of the Jesus movement, in which a life according to the Sermon of the Mount appeared possible, or the situation of select human beings, such as monks, who completely devote their lives to God—but not to Christianity as a whole?

Different answers have been given to these questions. As a matter of course, the ancient church viewed the Sermon on the Mount as capable of being fulfilled. The command to love one's enemies even became the distinguishing feature of the Christian faith. The radical nature of the demands was certainly in view. One encountered it through the recommendation that even if not all the demands could be fulfilled, one should at least keep what one was in position to fulfill. An initial formulation regarding this is already found at the beginning of the second century in the *Didache* at the conclusion of the teaching on the two ways: "If you are able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord [which means: if you can fulfill all his demands], you will

be perfect; if you are not able, then do what you can" (*Did.* 6.2). This does not mean a relativization of the ethical demands of Jesus. Rather, these continue to be the highest norm and are considered to be the norm that must be strived for, even if it cannot be kept always and by all. This was also the view of those groups that especially oriented themselves to the standard of the Sermon on the Mount, for example, the Waldensians, the Franciscans, the Anabaptist groups at the time of the Reformation, and also the religious socialists. Here, the radical ethic is practiced within the respective group and yet simultaneously viewed as the norm of Christian life as such. Although marked by a shift in emphasis, the distinction between commands (*praecepta*) applying to all and counsels (*consilia*) for the perfect, which was developed in the Middle Ages and played a role, for example, in Thomas Aquinas, can also be assigned to this understanding of the Sermon on the Mount.

The other solution seeks to understand the Sermon on the Mount not as a general ethical norm but as a limited program. One interpretation understands it as an expression of Jesus' imminent expectation that also called for a special ethos, which cannot, however, be directly transferred to later church situations. The reference to the Sermon on the Mount's historical situation of emergence is important, but the critical potential that the Sermon on the Mount possesses for Christian ethics may not be relativized. Another interpretation understands the Sermon on the Mount individualistically and distinguishes it from rules that are necessary for the functioning of a society. This view, which is encountered in Luther and frequently in the Lutheran tradition, also runs the risk of only insufficiently drawing out the potential of the Sermon of the Mount.

For a judgment about the significance of the Sermon on the Mount for a present-day praxis of the Christian faith, it is helpful to begin again with observations on the ethos of Jesus. We have seen that with regard to the demands of Jesus it is necessary to distinguish between demands that are directed to his immediate followers and those that apply to Israel as a whole. Jesus interpreted the activity of the followers wandering around with him as a provocative anticipation of the order of the reign of God, thus as a symbolic action that already confronted the contemporaries of Jesus and his followers in the present with the perfection of God. Matthew no longer understood this in this way,

but rather he understood the ethos summarized by him in the Sermon of the Mount as a program that was to be implemented by his community. Here, the social situation is comparable with that of Jesus insofar as Matthew's community was also a comparably small group and not a church-of-the-people (*Volkskirche*).

Thus, for a church that is conscious of its political and societal responsibilities, the Sermon on the Mount cannot be understood as a program that can be equally applied to every situation. To name only one example, the exhortation to radical renunciation of violence strikes against its limits where violence can be demanded in order to call a halt to greater violence and protect human beings. The resistance against National Socialism in the manner in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer formulated it as the task of the church, namely not only to enter into solidarity with those lying under the wheel but to fall into the spokes of the wheel itself, speaks for itself here. A rigorous insistence on the Sermon on the Mount can even be perceived by victims of violence as a presumptuous failure to take seriously their fate. A judgment such as that of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who on the basis of his experiences in a Soviet prison camp spoke out against the view that evil is to be overcome through good and judged that "one is not able to fight against evil with good," should at any rate not be lightly pushed to the side by those who have fortunately been spared such experiences.

Thus, the significance of the Sermon on the Mount does not reside in the fact that it has an instruction for action ready for every imaginable situation—this also could hardly be expected. It is, however, a critical standard that places the provisional compromises that often necessarily remain behind it under the critical sign of the perfection of the order of the reign of God that must be strived for. This critical potential must always remain guiding for the Christian ethos.

## Religion and Culture: Jesus in Present-Day Art and Literature

An interpretation of Jesus is always an expression of its own time. We have seen that this also applies to historical Jesus research, which has to verify its interpretations in relation to the oldest sources. By

contrast, the strength of the engagement with Jesus in art and literature consists in the immediacy with which Jesus is related to here. Hopes, longings, and fears, which are based in the respectively experienced reality, as well as criticism of social conditions and visions of justice and peace, can thereby enter into the interpretation of the Jesus figure in a direct way. The sphere of interpretation is much greater than in historical portrayals of Jesus. The center of gravity lies in the sketching of the Jesus figure into the present rather than in the past context of his activity. Ideally the historical and the artistic or literary engagement with Jesus complement one another: their common intersection lies in the respectively current situation in which they turn to the figure of Jesus. Historical Jesus research marks out the frameworks of interpretation within which the actualizing, artistic reworkings of the Jesus figure should move—even when they do this in a consciously alienating way. In what follows we will deal with one example from the spheres of twentieth-century film, painting, and literature respectively.

As a first example, the film *Jesus of Montreal* may be mentioned, which was produced in 1989 by the Canadian director Denys Arcand. The film narrates the story of the actor Daniel Colombe, who receives the task of staging an annual Passion play. The first performance is a great success, but the church is offended by it and tries to hinder further performances. The point of the film lies in the fact that Daniel, who plays the person of Jesus, is drawn ever more strongly into the history of Jesus in the course of the film. In doing so the film respects the boundary: Daniel is not simply a modern embodiment of Jesus. Arcand works much more subtly and constructs scenes in which the history of Jesus is encountered in modern refraction: Daniel goes against the humiliation of young actresses in a furious action and destroys the film studio; the media industry attempts to lead him astray with offers. The film ends with Daniel continuing the performance despite the resistances and then being taken down from the cross by the police at the crucifixion scene and arrested. After his death he lives on by his organs being transplanted into other human beings.

In its way the film is an expression of the fact that the engagement with the figure of Jesus has taken leave of wanting to be as historically faithful as possible in its portrayal. This was still different, for example, in the 1964 film *The Gospel According to Matthew* by the

Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini. Pasolini attempted to reproduce the atmosphere of the first century as authentically as possible and adhered closely to the Gospel of Matthew in his filming. Admittedly, his filming of the Jesus story also had a message that corresponded to its time. Pasolini was concerned to work out the social-critical components of the message of Jesus and make them fruitful for the present.

By contrast, *Jesus of Montreal* does not even attempt a historical portrayal but sketches the Jesus story into the late twentieth century. Arcand, as indicated by interviews concerning the film, by no means disputes thereby the significance of historical or archaeological investigations. But in his view the question "Who is Jesus today?" can be answered only if one confronts the results of these investigations with experiences in the present. Therefore, the film is filled with themes of his time. It deals with the emptying of life through the advertising industry, with the conflict with an inflexible, conservative church, and with organ transplants. Precisely because Arcand avoids the danger of actualizing Jesus in a superficial manner by maintaining a distinction between the historical and the actualizing levels, he succeeds in producing an appealing reworking of the Jesus story.

As a second example we will consider *The White Crucifixion* by Marc Chagall (Fig. A.10). In this painting, created in 1937–1938, the Jewish painter deals with the crucifixion against the background of the anti-Jewish pogrom in Russia. Jesus himself immediately catches one's eye through the white background of the cross—a symbol for the fact that he is executed as an innocent man. He is surrounded by Jewish symbols: the Hebrew inscription on the cross, the Jewish prayer shawl that he wears as a loincloth, and the menorah at the foot of the cross. Beside the cross to the right burns a synagogue from which someone seeks to save Torah scrolls. Next to the cross on the bottom left a man also runs from it with a Torah scroll. Over the cross float mourning Jews. Here, Jesus is portrayed as a Jewish martyr: he himself is unmistakably a Jew; his death stands for the suffering that was inflicted upon the Jewish people, down to the persecutions of the twentieth century. The painting arose before the pogrom night of 1938 and the subsequent National Socialist persecutions and executions of Jews. Today, these atrocities must naturally be thought of also, and they give Chagall's painting a nightmarish significance that

reaches beyond its historical location. A Christian viewing of this picture is not least reminded not to forget the origin of Jesus and with this the roots of Christianity in Judaism.

The third example comes from the sphere of literature. In his novel *L'évangile selon Pilate* (The Gospel According to Pilate), which appeared in French in 2000 and was translated into German in 2005, the French author Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt—known above all in Germany through his novella *Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Koran*, which was also made into a movie—narrates the Passion story from two perspectives. The first part of the book, designated as a "prologue," bears the heading "Confession of One Condemned to Death on the Evening of His Arrest." It involves a retrospect of Jesus on his previous life and a description of the circumstances that led to his arrest. In the second part, the main part of the book, under the heading "The Gospel According to Pilate," Pilate portrays in seven fictional letters "from Pilate to his beloved son" how he came to write down the events around the arrest, hearing, and crucifixion from his perspective. These two parts have also been revised under the common title *Mes évangiles* (My Gospel) for the stage. They were performed as *Die Nacht der Ölbäume* (Night in the Olive Groves) and *Das Pilatus-Evangelium* (The Gospel According to Pilate) in various German theaters (e.g., in Cologne). In the third part, an epilogue of sorts, the author himself speaks and describes the coming about of the book in the "Chronicle of a Stolen Novel."

In the "prologue," Jesus, who is called "Yeshua" in the novel, describes how it became increasingly clear to him during his activity that he had a special destiny to fulfill. He remains uncertain, however, about its origin and precise character and therefore also does not designate himself as "Messiah." The amazing things that take place through him (e.g., the healing of sick and possessed), and his contemporaries' reactions to his person—thus, for example, that they view him as Messiah and Son of God or become frightened before his authority—allow him, however, to recognize that he is equipped with an especially divine power. In Jerusalem it becomes clear to Yeshua that the resistance that has built up in the meantime will become a risk to life and limb for himself and for his followers. In this situation he decides to place himself before his followers and hand himself

over so that nothing happens. In order to implement this in actuality, he asks his favorite disciple, Yehudah (Judas), at the Last Supper to betray him, which Judas does with a heavy heart.

By contrast, the report of Pilate begins with the discovery of the disappearance of the body of Jesus. As a result Pilate feels compelled to look into the matter, and in the course of this he encounters more and more peculiarities about the Galilean itinerant preacher. There are even people who claim that Yeshua encountered them again after his crucifixion. Finally, Pilate must admit that there is something special about Yeshua that cannot be explained by means of logical reasoning. An important role in this process of realization is played by his wife, Claudia, who was healed from her flow of blood by Yeshua and as a result became his follower. At the end Pilate says to her that he feels compelled to believe those who bear witness to experiences with Yeshua, to which Claudia replies that he has thereby become the first Christian.

Schmitt wants to break up common clichés with his interpretation, for example of Jesus, Judas, and Pilate. With the help of the figure of Pilate he describes how the events around Jesus affected someone who was initially uninvolved and how they entangled him more and more in the history of Jesus. Schmitt does not understand the divinity of Jesus in the dogmatic sense, but he tries to explain it from the self-understanding and impact of the person of Jesus. Jesus was "divinely illuminated," but he was wholly human from his birth to the cross. This corresponds, as Schmitt observes in the appendix, precisely with the intention of the Gospels, which leave no doubt that Jesus was a human being—an admittedly one-sided view that would need to be discussed. Despite this holding fast to the humanity of Jesus, there is a secret surrounding Jesus that cannot be grasped by human understanding, which both Jesus himself and Pilate recognize in the book.

In his book Schmitt thus implements in a distinct way the reflection on the relation between the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, admittedly without entering into the dogmatic discussion. He understands his literary revision of the Passion story, behind which historical judgments certainly stand, as an adaption of the past events in the present, influenced by the manifold interpretations that have

grown up around these events in the *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Therefore, his book is not least a witness to the close connection between historical and literary engagements with the figure of Jesus.

## Historical Jesus—Christ of Faith: Who Is Jesus Today?

At the beginning of this book stood the observation that in the course of the history of Christianity Jesus has become a figure who has shaped our culture in a unique way. His (hi)story became a basic (hi)story—a "myth"—which takes up what moves people when they ask about the whence and whither of their life and of history as a whole and when they seek answers to questions about the meaning of suffering and look out for hope for the overcoming of evil.

The historical-critical quest for Jesus started out in order to understand how his person came to have this significance. The interpretations in the dogmas of the church and the legends of early Christianity were measured here by the standard of critical reason and judged as subordinate in relation to the historical findings. The Jesus who could endure the judgment of historical-critical reason was henceforth the "historical Jesus," who was separated from the Christ of faith and the Jesus enveloped by legends. With this an instrument was gained that is indispensible for further engagement with Jesus. It is true that the divine sonship of Jesus and the virgin birth were already called into doubt by enlightened spirits in antiquity. But modern historical criticism made irrevocably clear that we are dealing here not with historical statements but with statements that interpret the activity of Jesus by surrounding them with a divine aura.

Today, however, the "historical Jesus" project appears in a double refraction. The first refraction arises from the relativization of historical knowledge. A more precise consideration of the historical knowledge process shows that this process does not penetrate to the reality behind the texts. Rather, historical critical work sounds out the traditions with critical consciousness and places them together into a picture of Jesus that corresponds to the respective state of knowledge and the view of reality of the (male or female) interpreter. Historical

models are thus always a mediation of past and present. This also applies to pictures of the "historical Jesus," which can always only be approaches (*Annäherungen*) toward the world of Jesus and his activity and fate—but they have their significance precisely in this.

The second refraction says that the significance of Jesus is not drawn out by removing later interpretations from the historical findings and in this way gaining access to the "real Jesus." Rather, interpretations have always already belonged to the "real" Jesus. Here, one must, of course, differentiate: there are interpretations that are oriented closely to the findings of the oldest portrayals of Jesus and that evaluate them in a historical-critical manner; there are interpretations that bring the Jesus narrative into their respective reality through enlivening, novelistic embellishments; and finally, there are interpretations that pass themselves off as scholarly (*wissenschaftlich*) but exploit the Jesus figure for their own purposes. The first interpretations, which are found in scholarly Jesus books, provide a rationally checkable foundation for the engagement with Jesus. The second group builds on this and exposes the Jesus figure to today's reality, often in an unusual, provocative manner. Finally, with the help of historical criticism the third group can be seen through as nonserious and excluded from the engagement with Jesus.

Historical criticism does not lead to the "real" Jesus. It teaches one, however, to make the emergence of Jesus pictures comprehensible, and in this way to distinguish between various interpretations. With this it simultaneously possesses an ethical function, for it brings the right of the past into force in the present. Therefore, a present-day access to Jesus cannot pass by the discussions and results of historical-critical Jesus research. Rather, it will let itself be enriched by this in order to distinguish between historical probabilities, later legends, and misleading interpretations. In this way historical Jesus research makes its contribution—an indispensible contribution—to Christian theology and the Christian faith.

Who is Jesus today? We see more clearly that the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of faith" do not stand over against each other without any connection. Rather, there are multiple connections that lead from the activity of the earthly Jesus to the emergence of the Christian faith. We also see that the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Jesus has led to very distinct interpretations that are only loosely connected with his activity. Who

Jesus is for us today is therefore decided above all by how we deal with the historical findings in order to bring the significance of Jesus into effect on this foundation. In this way, the "Jesus myth"—the Jesus story in the whole power and reach of the interpretations inherent in it—can be discovered anew time and again as a story that has answers ready for the pressing questions that move human beings at different times. Therefore, the question of who Jesus *was* cannot be separated from the question of who he *is* today.

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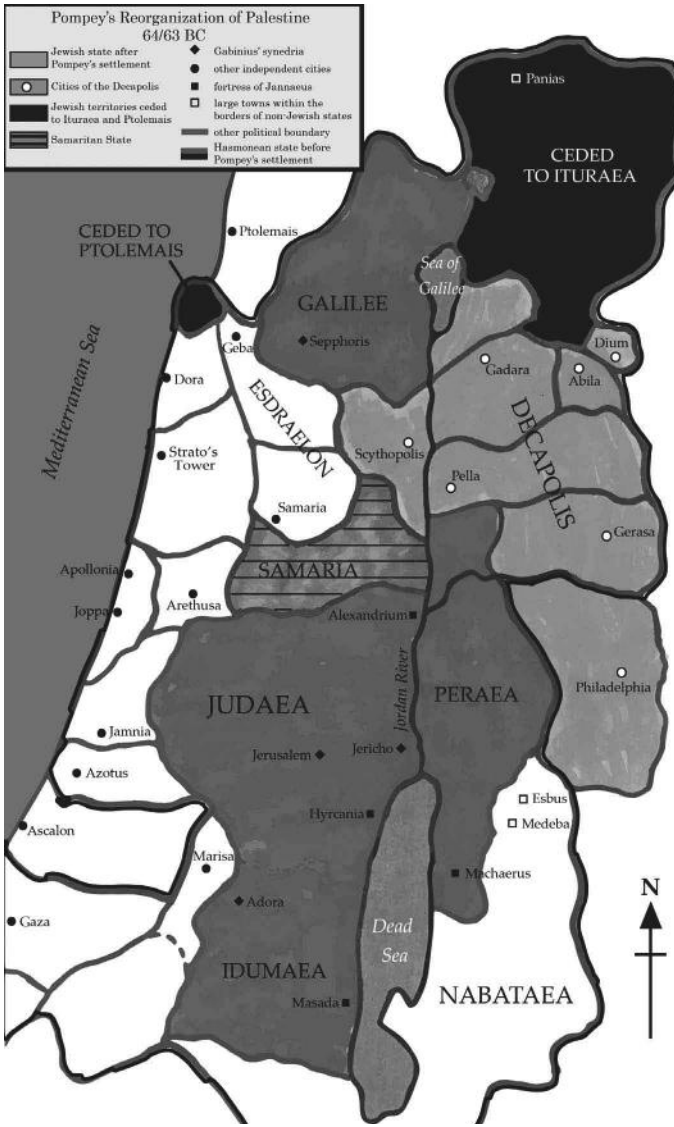
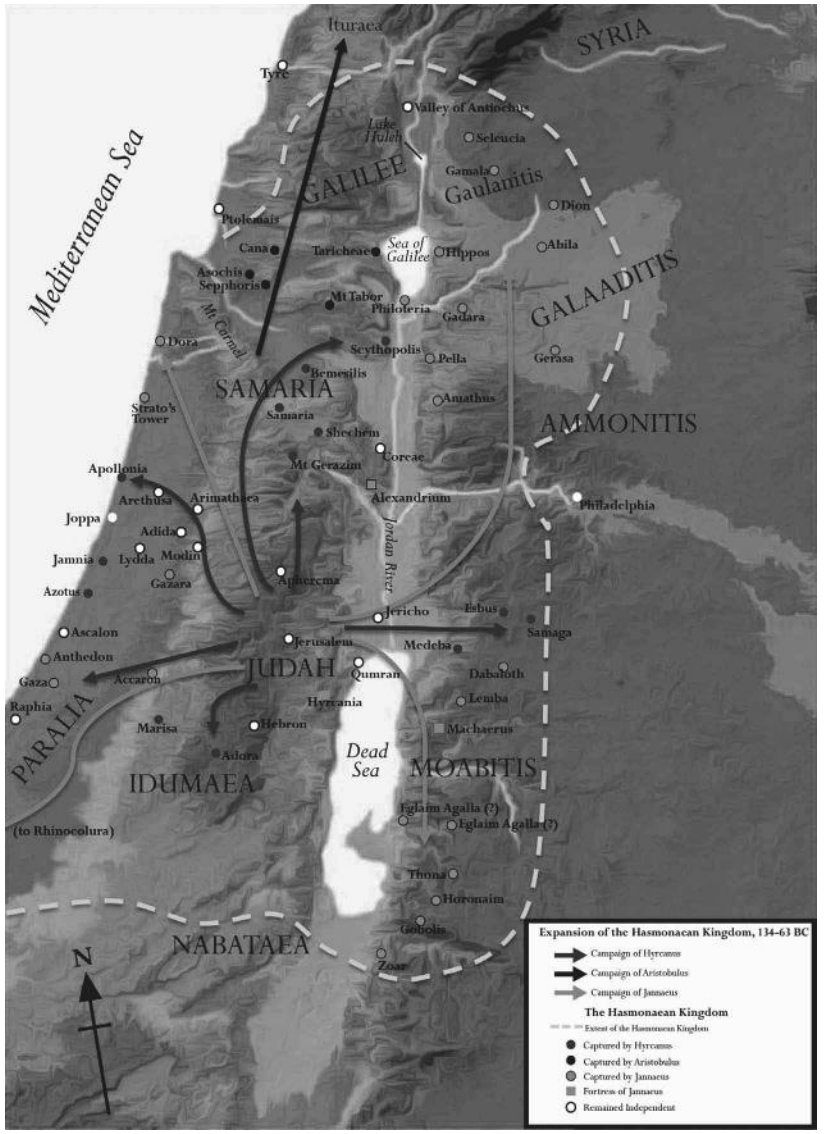
# Appendix

# MAPS AND FIGURES

Map 1
*Topography of Galilee (with streets shown). Map copyright Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, from* Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients *(TAVO), ed. Detlef Jericke/Götz Schmitt, B V 18. Palästina. Siedlungen in griechisch-römischer Zeit (ca. 300 v.Chr. bis 300 n.Chr.) (Palestine: Settlements in Greco-Roman time [ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE]).*



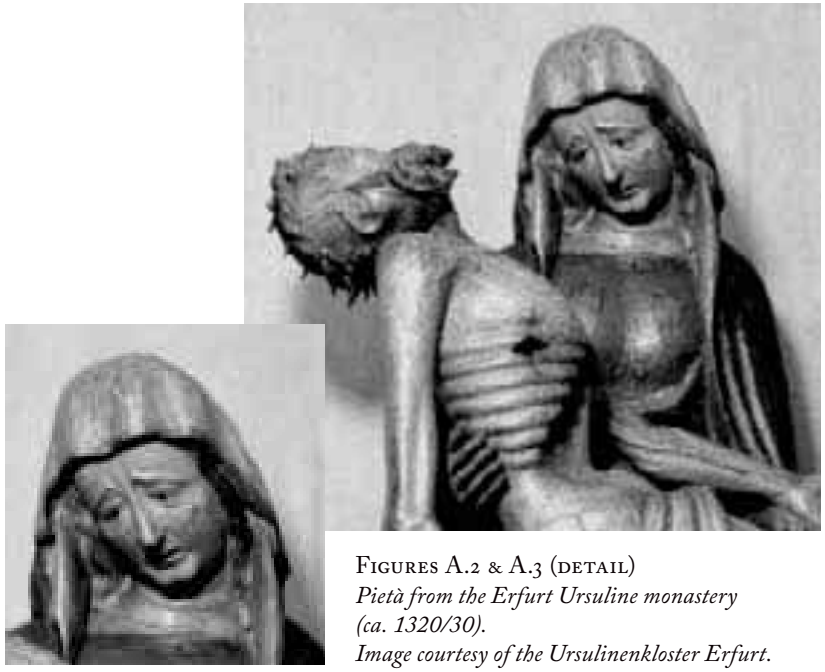

Map 2
*Pompey's reorganization of Palestine*



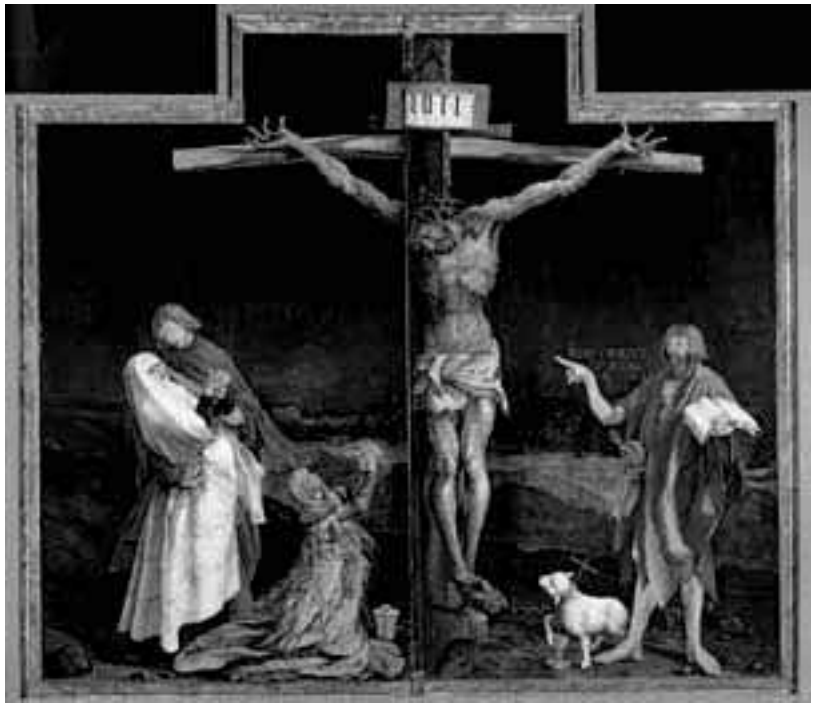

Map 3

*The conquest of the Maccabees under John Hyrcanus (134–104), Aristobulus I (104–103; he conquered Galilee), and Alexander Jannaus (103–76).*
*Map template provided by the Ancient World Mapping Center at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.*

Figure A.1
*Bethabara, the place of baptism of St. John, from the Madaba Mosaic Map. Church of Saint George, Ma'daba, Jordan. © World Religions Photo Library. The Bridgeman Art Library.*



Figures A.2 & A.3 (detail)
*Pietà from the Erfurt Ursuline monastery (ca. 1320/30). Image courtesy of the Ursulinenkloster Erfurt.*



Figures A.4 & A.5 (detail) *Matthias Grünewald (Mathis Gothart Nithart) (ca. 1475/1480–1528),* Isenheim Altarpiece, *ca. 1512–1515 (oil on panel), with detail of the crucifixion. Musee d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France. Giraudon. The Bridgeman Art Library.*

Figure A.6
*Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) (ca. 1488–1576),* Pietà. *Galleria dell' Accademia, Venice, Italy. The Bridgeman Art Library.*

Figure A.7
*Matthias Grünewald (1475/1480–1528), The* Resurrection *(oil on panel), detail from the* Isenheim Altarpiece, *ca. 1515. De Agostini Picture Library. The Bridgeman Art Library.*

Figure A.8
*Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1266–1337),* St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata, *ca. 1295–1300 (tempera on panel). Louvre, Paris, France. The Bridgeman Art Library.*

Figure A.9
*The oldest representation of the Sermon on the Mount on a fragment of a relief from the fourth century.* The Miracles of Jesus: Sermon on the Mount. *Early Christian sarcophagus. Museo Nazionale Romano (Terme di Diocleziano), Rome, Italy. Alinari/ Art Resource, New York.*

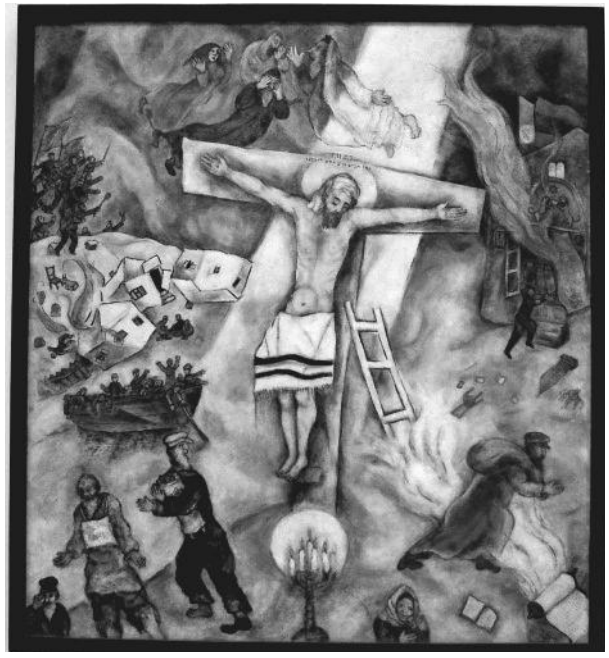


Figure A.10
*Marc Chagall*, The White Crucifixion *(1937–1938). Image courtesy of Pamela Schreckengost.*

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# Notes

## Preface to the First Edition

1 Meier 1991; 1994; 2001; Dunn 2003. See now also Meier 2009.
2 Alongside those of Meier and Dunn, mention may be made of the following Jesus books: Freyne 2004; Sanders 1991; 1993; Ebner 2003; Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996]; 1998; Becker 1996; Crossan 1991; Vermes 1993; Schenke 2004; Chilton/Evans 1998; Allison 2010.

## Chapter 1

1 This reckoning was developed by the monk Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century CE. He was the first one to take the birth of Jesus as the starting point and counted *anni ab incarnatione domini* ("years since the incarnation of the Lord"). He miscalculated, however, by a few years. The final establishment of the Christian reckoning of time first took place a few centuries later. Other forms of reckoning time are in force in non-Christian lands—e.g., in Israel and in Arabian countries.
2 In the 1980s, initiated by the Evangelical Church in Germany's position paper "Frieden wahren, fördern und erneuern" (Preserving, Advancing and Renewing Peace), there was an intensive discussion concerning the political capacity of the Sermon on the Mount. Cf., e.g., Hengel 1981; Huber 1982. See now also Käsemann 2010, 120–32 and 142–52.
3 Rom 8.29; 2 Cor 4.4; Col 1.15 (image); Rom 8.29; Col 1.15, 18; Rev 1.5 (first born); Heb 1.3 (reflection, imprint).
4 Here the conflict over the Beelzebul accusation in Mark 3.22-30/Luke 11.14-23/Matt 12.22-30 is especially significant. See "God or Satan?" in ch. 8.

5 Cf. Moxter 2002.
6 Cf. Scholder 1966; 1990.
7 Reference must be made above all to the discovery of the Qumran scrolls (1947–1956), which caused quite a sensation, and yet also to the publication of the *Assumption of Moses* (1861) and of the book of *Jubilees*, which first appeared in a modern European language in 1851 in a translation from the Ethiopic.
8 Paul Ricoeur once again stressed this ethical dimension of the engagement with the past in his last great work. Cf. Ricoeur 2004a; 2004b.
9 Cf. also the remarks of Dunn 2003, 99–136.

## Chapter 2

1 Published as E. Käsemann 1964a [1954]; 1964b [1954].
2 Cf., e.g., Porter 2000, who distinguishes between four periods. Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 22–30 (cf. 1998, 2–11) suggest a division into five phases. Attention must be given in any case to the fact that the modern Jesus research, irrespective of its more detailed division, is characterized by common presuppositions. Common to all phases is the aforementioned differentiation between primitive Christian witness and historical reality, the conviction that Jesus must be understood from the conditions of his time, and the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.
3 On this cf. also the informative overview of du Toit 2002. Cf. further Schröter 2001; 2013, 95–132.
4 Cf. the programmatic article of Meier 1999 as well as Evans 1995, 1–49.
5 Cf. Lessing 1968.
6 What D. F. Strauss calls "myth" R. Bultmann designates as "kerygma," behind which historical research is not able to reach. Cf. esp. Bultmann 1967. For L. T. Johnson's relevant publications, see Johnson 1996; 1998; 2009, 154n2.
7 Several statements of R. Bultmann bring such a stance to expression. Cf., e.g., Bultmann 1988 [1926], 10 (cf. Bultmann 1962, 8): "[A]dmittedly I am of the opinion that we can now know almost nothing about the life and personality of Jesus, since the Christian sources did not show an interest in either, are moreover very fragmentary and overgrown with legend, and since other sources do not exist." Bultmann 1967, 454: "This [the kerygma, J.S.] is not interested in the 'objective historical character' beyond the 'that,' but it requires faith in Christ the crucified and risen one, and it understands the history of Jesus from there—to the extent that it is at all interested in it."
8 Thus rightly also Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 98–122; 1998, 93–121.
9 In Bultmann 1967, 451–52, Bultmann provides a concise summary of what can be said in his opinion "with some caution" about the activity of Jesus. He lists the exorcisms, violation of Sabbath and purity laws, polemic against "Jewish legalism," fellowship with outcasts, and the establishment of a distinct community. This does not, of course, represent a historically certain "minimal consensus" but a certain selection from the traditions, which could also be viewed differently.

10 In Bultmann's Jesus book the "temporal-historical framework" is treated in a few pages before the "proclamation of Jesus" is then developed as the thing that Jesus "actually wanted." With G. Bornkamm the historical context is also sketched in an introductory section titled "Time and Environment," whereas it hardly plays any role in the presentation itself. This direction of Jesus research has found a continuation in parts of recent Q research. Here a supposedly older layer of this hypothetical source is traced back to Jesus. It is no accident that in such an approach much attention is also given to the *Gospel of Thomas*, which mostly contains sayings and parables of Jesus without context, thus—in a certain analogy to the research approach that has been sketched—it forgoes a presentation of the historical context.
11 Cf. Schweitzer 1984 [1913], 621 (cf. 2000, 479): "The work that historical theology believed it had to carry out . . . was only the brick facing of the true unshakeable historical foundation, which is independent of any historical knowledge and legitimation, because it is just there."
12 Schweitzer includes in such "conceptual material" (*Vorstellungsmaterial*), e.g., the "primitive, late-Jewish metaphysic, in which Jesus expresses his worldview." Cf. Schweitzer 1984 [1913], 623 (cf. 2000, 481).
13 Cf. Theissen/Winter 1997, 42–65; 2002, 42–63.
14 Sanders 1991, 61–76.
15 Cf. Horsley 1995.

## Chapter 3

1 Droysen 1977, 400–401. Droysen also speaks of "monuments," a category in which the characteristics of remains and sources are combined. E.g., he assigns inscriptions, coins, and documents (*Urkunden*) to this category.
2 Cf. Reed 2000; Chancey 2002. I will return to this in ch. 5, "The Galilean."
3 Cf. Riesner 1986; 1987; Wachsmann 1997; Cohen 2003.
4 These include, e.g., the so-called "infancy gospels" that embellish the birth stories of Matthew and Luke and augment them with legends, as well as the "conversations with the risen Jesus," which take the appearances of the risen Jesus reported in the older gospels as the starting point for their presentations and place teaching in the mouth of the Risen One.
5 Cf. Schröter 2005; 2013, 249–71.
6 Cf. ch. 4, "The Nazarene."
7 The origins of this form lie in the biographical tradition of popular philosophy. The composition of chriae belonged to the ancient school exercises, for which reason there are proper teaching examples for the ideal form of a chria. A typical example in the New Testament is Luke 17.20-21: "Asked by the Pharisees when the reign of God is coming he answered: the reign of God does not come by looking for it. One also cannot say: look here or: there. For behold, the reign of God is right in your midst." If one attends to this "ideal form," then it is conspicuous that the chriae of the Jesus tradition often contain biographical information, which points to a "historical" interest in Jesus.

8 John 2.22; 7.39; 12.16; 14.26.
9 Cf. also ch. 4, "The Nazarene."
10 It must be taken into account that there were different copies of the Gospels that often differed from one another. The textual version that we find in today's editions of the New Testament is therefore based on the textual critical evaluation of a multitude of manuscripts that never completely agree with one another. Thus, e.g., the expression "Son of God" in Mark 1.1 is attested by only some of the manuscripts. A further important insight of textual criticism says that the Gospel of Mark originally ended with the fear of the women at the empty tomb (Mark 16.8) and was expanded with various conclusions only secondarily. It is very probable that there were also differences between the copies of Mark that were used by Matthew and Luke.
11 This could explain the peculiarity of the so-called "great omission" in Luke: In the Gospel of Luke the events reported in Mark 6.45–8.26 are completely lacking. It is possible that Luke used an edition of Mark that did not contain this section. It is, however, also possible that he left out this material for thematic reasons.
12 It is occasionally hypothesized that Papias' note (ca. 125 CE) that Matthew put together the logia of Jesus in the Hebrew language refers to Q. This, however, is improbable. Here Papias almost certainly means the Gospel of Matthew itself.
13 Cf. the monumental edition of Robinson/Hoffmann/Kloppenborg 2000.
14 These are treated in detail in Schröter 1997.
15 Thus, e.g., the Johannine Jesus says in 10.17-18 that he is sent from the Father in order to lay down his life and to take it up again thereafter—a completely distinctive way of speaking of death and resurrection! Jesus' indication to Pilate that Pilate has power over him only because it is given to him from above (19.11) is comparable.
16 M. Theobald demonstrated this not long ago in a thorough analysis. Cf. Theobald 2002.
17 These works were admittedly never treated as a distinct group of writings in antiquity. Rather, their placement together in a corpus, including their rather arbitrary designation, was first carried out in 1672 by Jean-Baptist Cotelier.
18 A generally accessible overview of such texts is found in the issue "Die apokryphen Evangelien" of the journal *Bibel und Kirche* (60/2, 2005).
19 E.g., the secondary endings of Mark, the narrative of Jesus and the adulteress in John 7.53–8.11, and the Jesus saying in Luke 6.5 would all be "apocryphal" in this sense. In all of these cases we are dealing with later additions to the original texts that are nevertheless contained in today's editions of the New Testament—even if they are also usually designated as later additions.
20 The new edition of the work of W. Schneemelcher is therefore titled *Ancient Christian Apocrypha*, which avoids the misleading title "New Testament Apocrypha." See Markschies/Schröter 2012.
21 A new introduction to the apocryphal Jesus tradition is provided by Klauck 2002; 2003a. A collection of many of these texts in their original language and in German translation, together with an instructive introduction, can be

found in Lührmann 2000. The standard work for the German translations has been Schneemelcher 1990/1997 (ET: 1991/1992), which has now appeared in a new edition, namely Markschies/Schröter 2012. A new translation of the Nag Hammadi writings can be found in Schenke/Bethge/Kaiser 2001.

22 Cf., e.g., Pagels 2003. The German translation, Pagels 2004, appeared with the sensationalizing title *The Secret of the Fifth Gospel: Why the Bible Only Tells Half the Truth* (from which, however, the author immediately distances herself again in the preface).

23 Cf. Klauck 2002, 36–40; 2003a, 23–26; Lührmann 2000, 142–53.

24 Cf. Lührmann 2004, 125–43. With the help of an analysis of the Köln fragments, Lührmann explains why he has now changed his earlier view of Papyrus Egerton 2. On this papyrus, cf. also Klauck 2002, 36–40; 2003a, 23–26.

25 Cf. Klauck 2002, 110–18; 2003a, 82–88; Lührmann 2000, 72–95; Plisch 2006, 17–25.

26 For a discussion of these fragments and further aspects of the tradition history of the *Gospel of Peter* cf. Lührmann 2004, 55–104. Cf. also Klauck 2002, 110–18; 2003a, 82–88.

27 Cf. Klauck 2002, 207–18; 2003a, 160–69; Plisch 2006, 137–42, as well as http://www.thenazareneway.com/the_gospel_of_mary_magdalene.htm.

28 On these fragments cf. Lührmann 2000, 62–71; 2004, 105–24.

29 Cf. Hartenstein 2000, 157–58.

30 An introduction and German translation can be found in Schröter/Bethge 2001; 2012. Cf., e.g., DeConick 2006; Plisch 2008; Goodacre 2012; Gathercole 2012; 2014.

31 The *Gospel of Peter*, which is also mentioned in ancient church sources, presents an analogy to this situation. The *Gospel of Judas*, whose text was made accessible to the public in April 2006, was also already mentioned by Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 180).

32 This is also rightly stressed by Freyne 2004, 5–6.

33 Cf. the analyses of Meier 1991, 59–88, and Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 75–82; 1998, 65–73.

34 Thus also Ebner 2003, 26.

35 Mark 7.24-30/Matt 15.21-28: a Syrophonecian/Canaanite woman; Luke 7.1-10/Matt 8.5-13: a centurion; John 12.20-21: some Greeks.

36 The fire of Rome presumably took place in 64 CE, thus in the late period of Nero's rule (54–68).

37 Cf. "Remains" above.

38 Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2: "One proceeded against the Christians with death sentences, a class of human beings that had given itself to a new and reprehensible superstition." For Claudius' expulsion of the Jews, which is discussed below, see Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4.

39 In January 2006 the ZDF aired a program in the context of the series Terra X, in which there was speculation about a possible stay of Jesus in India where he could have become familiar with Far Eastern wisdom teachings in his youth. If the producers of the program had instead occupied themselves with Jewish

wisdom traditions, then they would have had at their disposal sufficient material that actually played a role in the proclamation of Jesus—in contrast to the bizarre theory of a stay in India.

## Chapter 4

1 Cf. Mark 1.9; Matt 21.11; Luke 4.16.
2 We encounter the forms "Nazarene" and "Nazorean," the former in Mark 1.24; 10.47; 14.67; Luke 4.34; 24.19; the latter in Matt 2.23; 26.71; Luke 18.4, 7; 19.19; Acts 2.22; 3.6; 4.10; 6.14; 22.8; 24.5 (the Christians as "Nazoreans"); 26.9. Both designations are derived from the place-name and are synonymous in content.
3 John 7.42, 52; cf. 6.42.
4 For the analysis of these narratives, cf., e.g., Meier 1991, 208–52.
5 In Luke 4.16 Nazareth is distinguished from Bethlehem by the fact that it is designated as the city in which Jesus was raised.
6 The information concerning the census involves a number of historical problems: as a rule such tax assessments affected individual provinces, but not the whole Roman Empire. A provincial census at the time of Quirinius is attested for 6 CE and is connected with the dismissal of Herod's son Archelaus. Luke moves this census into the period of the birth of Jesus and presents it as a tax assessment for the entire Roman Empire that has been arranged by the emperor. In this way the birth of Jesus is linked with a political event on the world stage in order to highlight its historical significance.
7 Matthew explicitly cites for this the prophecy in Isaiah about the birth of Immanuel from a virgin (Isa 7.14, cited in Matt 1.23). The verse also stands behind Luke 1.31.
8 With this Matthew alludes to Num 24.17: "A star comes forth from Jacob, a scepter rises from Israel."
9 Cf. Klauck 2003b.
10 The only historically usable information from the birth stories is the placement of the birth of Jesus at the time of the reign of Herod the Great (Matt 2.1/Luke 1.5).
11 Cf. Lohse 2003, 65.
12 Rumors about an extramarital union of Mary with a Roman soldier by the name of Panthera, from which Jesus was said to have come, have circulated since the second century (cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.32). It can, however, scarcely be assumed that the narratives of the virgin birth are a reaction against such polemic, which would then have to be even older. It is more probable that the rumor was spread as a reaction to the tradition of the virgin birth by Jewish and pagan opponents of early Christianity. The tradition of not mentioning the father of Jesus due to the confession of his status as the Son of God could stand behind Mark 6.3, where it is conspicuous that only the name of Jesus' mother is mentioned ("Is this not the craftsman, the Son of Mary?").
13 On Nazareth cf. Strange 1992b; Crossan/Reed 2001, 49–70.

14 Mark 6.3 mentions his mother as well as the brothers and sisters of Jesus.
15 The translation "carpenter" is too narrow. The Greek *tekton* designates a craftsman who works with wood or stone.
16 Cf. "The Community of the Children of God" in ch. 8.
17 Cf., e.g., Matt 10.37-38 (Luke 14.26): "The one who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. And the one who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Cf. also "Homelessness, Discipleship, and the Circle of the Twelve" in ch. 8.
18 The episode about the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple in Luke 2 is a legend that portrays Jesus as knowledgeable in the Scriptures. The apocryphal tradition subsequently increases the legends about his childhood, e.g., the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.

## Chapter 5

1 Thus Mack 1993.
2 Cf. Freyne 1988, 35.
3 Cf. Strange 1992a.
4 Cf. Crossan/Reed 2001, 59–61. The relevant buildings found in Nazareth and Capernaum come from the fourth century. It ought to be mentioned, though, that more recently a synagogue has been discovered in Magdala.
5 Cf. Corbo 1992; Loffreda 1997; Loffreda/Tzaferis 1993. Capernaum was acquired in 1894 by the Franciscans, who conducted multiple excavations there between 1968 and 1986.
6 On Capernaum, cf. also Crossan/Reed 2001, 118–35; Zangenberg 2003.
7 From this episode one can presumably infer that the concern is actually with the house of the wife of Simon, thus that Simon lived with the family of his wife. According to John 1.44 Simon himself came from Bethsaida, to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee.
8 Mark 2.1; 3.20; 7.17; 9.33.
9 Matthew provides a salvation-historical explanation for this move: Jesus settled in Capernaum in order that the Scripture (Isa 8.23-24) might be fulfilled, according to which the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali would see a great light (Matt 4.12-16). Capernaum lies in the territory of Naphtali.
10 See "The Community of the Children of God" in ch. 8.
11 Whether Pharisees can be presupposed in Galilee at the time of Jesus is admittedly uncertain but at least possible; the possibility of Sadducees, by contrast, can be ruled out. Cf. also ch. 6, "The Jew," on the Jewish parties.
12 Mark 3.6; 12.13 par. Matt 22.16.
13 Only the Lukan Passion story reports such an encounter: in Luke 23.6-12 Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean and has him brought to Antipas, who is then staying in Jerusalem. The historicity of this episode, however, is uncertain.
14 Thus, Herod caused the Jerusalem temple to be substantially expanded and built palaces in Jerusalem and Caesarea as well as many fortresses, including Masada on the Dead Sea and the Herodion. Cf. Vogel 2002, 180–209.

15 The excavation campaigns in Sepphoris, which have been conducted since the 1980s by the University of Florida under the direction of James F. Strange as well as by the Joint Sepphoris Project of Duke University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem under the direction of Eric M. Meyers, Carol L. Meyers, and Ehud Netzer, have placed the investigations on Sepphoris upon a completely new foundation. A good overview on Sepphoris and its significance for Jesus research is offered by Reed 2000, 103–38 and Chancey 2002, 69–83.

16 Josephus, *Ant.* 17.271–72 (on the revolt of Judas) and 17.289 (on the destruction of Sepphoris) as well as *J.W.* 2.56, 68. The extent of the destruction is, however, an open question. Josephus evidently exaggerates, since in the excavations in Sepphoris no traces came to light that would confirm the complete burning down of the city asserted by him. Cf. E. Meyers 1999, 109–22, 114; Reed 2000, 117.

17 Thus esp. Batey 1984.

18 Cf., e.g., Reed 2000, 119: second half of the first century; Meyers/Meyers 1997, 533: first half of the second century.

19 Cf. Edwards 1992, 62–65. By contrast, there are no grounds for turning the *craftsmen* Joseph and Jesus into *day laborers* who were forced into itinerancy in order to find work (so, however, Ebner 2003, 120–21). A connection between the itinerant existence of Jesus and his occupation is nowhere established in the sources. That the family of Jesus had no property (Ebner 2003, 120–21) is also mere speculation. The sources provide no information about this matter.

20 On this cf. esp. Freyne 1988.

21 This division is already found in Josephus, *J.W.* 3.35 and then also in the rabbinic literature (Shevi 9.2). Cf. further E. Meyers 1998, 29.

22 Fassbeck/Fortner/Rottloff/Zangenberg 2003 is devoted to the region around the sea as a distinctive sphere of culture and life.

23 E. Meyers 1998, 29.

24 Reed 2000, 79–92, 94, estimates that Scythopolis and Caesarea Maritima had populations at least double those of Sepphoris and Tiberias. According to Reed, the latter had approximately 8,000 to 12,000 or between 6,000 and 12,000 inhabitants.

25 Cf. Reed 2000, 125–31; Chancey 2002, 76–83.

26 Tiberias was founded by Antipas around 20 CE. Cf. Strange 1992c.

27 Cf. Freyne 2000, 45–58.

28 Cf. Reed 2000, 77–89; Freyne 2000, 183–207, esp. 190–96.

29 Cf. Freyne 2000, 160–82, esp. 167–70.

30 Cf. Freyne 2000, 183–207.

31 Thirty Jewish ossuaries with Greek inscriptions were discovered at a cemetery to the north of Scythopolis. In the vicinity of Jerusalem four bilingual (Greek-Aramaic) ossuary inscriptions from Scythopolis were also discovered. Cf. Edwards 1992, 70.

32 Horsley 1995 has recently advocated the thesis of a poor rural population that stood in tension with the leading elite who possibly came into the land at a later point.

33 Cf. "Remains" in ch. 3. It is, however, also possible that the boat was first rebuilt during the Jewish-Roman war and in the process obtained the size that can be inferred from the wreckage. This possibility is mentioned on the informational plaque in the exhibit hall.
34 Cf. the map in *Neues Bibel-Lexicon*, vol. 2, Zürich 1995, col. 122.
35 Fear of Archelaus is given as the reason that Joseph and his family moved to Galilee. Luke reworked the events surrounding his deposition in the parable of the entrusted talents (Luke 19.11-27). I have already made reference to the connection to the census of Quirinius in n. 6 of ch. 4 above.
36 Cf. Reed 2000, 28–43.
37 Cf. Chancey 2002.
38 Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 167 (cf. 1998, 175) also concede that "precisely the time of Jesus was relatively peaceful"—even if it was "in a period characterized by crises." The characterization of this time as a crisis period is based on the fact that the situation in Galilee at the time of Antipas is placed—as in Josephus—in a historical line of development that reaches from the uprisings under Hezekiah, who was put to death by Herod in 47 BCE, to the Jewish-Roman war of 66–70 CE. Galilee appears here as a refuge of resistance and zealotry, which Jesus and his followers could not have avoided. In light of the thoroughly different developments in Judea and Galilee, however, the picture looks different. That the various revolts represent part of an interconnected historical development is by no means clear.
39 Cf. Matt 26.73: Peter is recognized in Jerusalem by his accent.

## Chapter 6

1 The older view is still expressed, e.g., by Bornkamm 1995 [1956], 32 (cf. 1960, 37): "Without a doubt the religion of ancient Israel . . . experienced in Judaism a massive narrowing and fossilization. . . . But even in its perversion the original understanding of God's power and law is . . . recognizable."
2 These are presented in depth in Sanders 1992. A short summary is found in Sanders 1993, 33–39, as well as in Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 126–28; 1998, 126–29.
3 The writings that belonged here were established in practice since the second century BCE and varied in only minor ways in the third part, namely the "remaining Writings." Therefore, in the New Testament we find the formulations "Law and Prophets" (Matt 5.17; 7.12; 11.13 [Luke 16.16]; 22.40; John 1.45; Acts 13.15; Rom 3.21) as well as "Law of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms" (Luke 24.44).
4 One can also translate the Hebrew word "Torah" with "instruction." In this translation the positive intention that is oriented to a successful life better comes to expression. The Greek and Latin translation have placed the accent more strongly on rules and regulations. This aspect is, of course, also contained in "Torah," but it should not be understood only in a restrictive sense.

5 This then changes in Paul, who reflects in a fundamental manner on the function of the law for the position of the human being before God and therefore places Jews and Gentiles on the same level before God. In the case of Jesus, one does not yet encounter such an engagement with the law.
6 This point will be developed in greater detail in "The New Israel" and "Opponents" in ch. 8.
7 Thus, e.g., the Wisdom of Solomon, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 2 Maccabees, and the writings of Philo and Josephus.
8 This period is treated in detail by Vogel 2002.
9 The apocalyptic writings include, e.g., the book of Daniel, which emerged at the beginning of the second century BCE, as well as the first (Ethiopic) book of Enoch, whose oldest parts presumably come from the pre-Maccabean period; the wisdom writings include, e.g., Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon.
10 Cf. Ebner 2003, 64–78. The view, which was conventional for a long time, that the profile of the Essenes can be drawn out from the Qumran writings is becoming ever more questionable. Cf. the excursus below. This was already taken into account in Ebner 2003, 67n68.
11 Josephus does not call the party of Judas "Zealots." He first speaks of such a group in the context of the Jewish-Roman war, thus a few decades after the appearance of Judas the Galilean (*J.W.* 4.160). The so-called "sicarii" ("dagger bearers," from Latin *sica*, i.e., dagger) also first turn up later.
12 Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 8.11.1-8.
13 In his autobiography Josephus reports that he went through the Jewish parties in succession and attached himself in the end to the Pharisees. One may not, however, overrate this testimony, since it reflects a frequently occurring literary topos about the search for the best life philosophy.
14 Cf. "Purity for the Impure" in ch. 8.
15 Matt 3.7; 16.1, 6, 11-12.
16 The number refers to the cave in which the writing was found; "Q" stands for "Qumran," and the letter that follows for the writing. "1QS" thus means the writing was found in cave 1 from Qumran and is designated with the letter "S" (for "Sect Rule" or "Serekh Hayahad," i.e., "Rule of the Community").
17 A good introduction to Qumran research is given by VanderKam/Flint 2002.
18 Sukenik developed his theory on the basis of a number of scrolls from cave 1 (1QS, 1QM, 1QH, 1QGenAp, 1QpHab, 1QIsa and b). When more and more scrolls were added later, it had to be modified accordingly.
19 This theory, however, already had to be relativized in the 1980s, since more and more texts emerged that could not have come from an Essene "sect." As a result, there arose the idea of a library in Qumran in which other texts were also preserved.
20 For recent developments in Qumran research, cf. Galor/Humbert/Zangenberg 2006; Hirschfeld 2006; Magness 2002; Collins 2009.
21 In *J.W.* 2.160–61 Josephus does, however, mention a special group of Essenes

that hold a more positive view of marriage and regard it as necessary for the sake of the continuance of the human race.

22 Stemberger 1991, 115, 119, already observed that Josephus "despite his detailed depiction of the Essenes . . . scarcely provides historically usable data" and his (hi)story of the Jewish religious parties can "only in the rarest cases . . . be connected with the Qumran texts with relative certainty."

23 Josephus never designates these figures as "Messiahs." Therefore, one should also not speak of "Messianic movements" (so Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 139; 1998, 141).

24 In what follows only a few aspects of the person of John are mentioned. Müller 2002 has submitted a presentation on John in the same series in which the German version of this book appeared, namely *Biblische Gestalten* (Biblical Figures), to which the reader may be expressly referred for further aspects.

25 Here, however, the later understanding of Christian baptism must not be projected back onto John. He understood by this a symbolic act that was tied to him and that preserved one from the wrath of God.

26 The preaching of John is available only in the form of a Christian reworking. The mention of the Holy Spirit in the announcement of the baptism of the announced Stronger One in Matthew and Luke should probably also be traced back to this reworking.

27 An exact localization of the place of baptism (if it was only *one* place) is scarcely still possible. On a floor mosaic from the sixth century CE in east-Jordan Madaba it is placed shortly before the entrance of the Jordan into the Dead Sea. Cf. Figure A.1 in the appendix.

28 Cf. 1 Kgs 19.13, 19; 2 Kgs 2.8, 13-14 (mention of the mantle of Elijah); 2 Kgs 1.8 (Elijah is called "man of hair," which presumably refers to his mantle); Zech 13.4 (mention of the mantle of hair as clothing of the prophets of Israel). The Septuagint mentions a leather belt of Elijah (2 Kgs 1.8).

29 In Mark 1.2 the citation from Mal 3.1, which speaks of the coming of the forerunner of God and with this means Elijah, as Mal 3.23-24 allows one to surmise, is related to John. In Mark 9.13 John is explicitly identified as the returning Elijah.

30 Disciples of John are mentioned in Mark 2.18; 6.29; Luke 7.18 (Q); John 1.35. Acts 19.1-7 reports a story about "around twelve disciples" of John in Ephesus.

31 This possibility is mentioned by Thomason 1992.

32 According to Josephus, Herodias was previously married, however, to another son of Herod, who was also called Herod (*Ant.* 18.109–15). Perhaps there is a mix-up in Mark.

33 Similar motifs are found, e.g., in the Greek historian Herodotus (5th c. BCE), in the book of Esther, and in Josephus.

34 Perhaps this explains the arrangement of Luke 16.16-18: here mention is first made of the continuing validity of the law in connection with John, and then sending away one's wife and marrying a divorced woman is designated as adultery.

Chapter 7

1 Acts 1.22; 10.37; 13.24-25.
2 It is no accident that the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel of Matthew is no longer part of John's baptism but is connected instead with the Lord's Supper (Matt 26.28).
3 John 1.32.
4 Mark 1.2-3, 7-8 par. Isa 40.3 (the voice of the one who calls in the wilderness) stands in the background as well as a mixed quotation from Mal 3.1/Exod 23.20 (the sent-ahead messenger who prepares the way).
5 Cf. Mark 9.13 [Matt 17.12-13]; Luke 1.17, 76.
6 The statement of Jesus' sinlessness sometimes occurs in the New Testament. Cf., e.g., 2 Cor 5.21: God made the one "*who knew no sin* to be sin for us." Cf. also John 7.18; 1 John 3.5; Heb 4.15; 7.26 and other texts.
7 This is not explicitly reported, but it is presupposed in the entire depiction of his activity. On this point, cf. also "Homelessness, Discipleship, and the Circle of the Twelve" in ch. 8.
8 Hypotheses that occasionally surface about a supposed marriage of Jesus with Mary Magdalene lack any foundation. Rather, the call for the dissolution of familial bonds that is addressed to his immediate followers is characteristic of Jesus.
9 Cf. Schenke 2004, 84–105, esp. 85; Moxnes 2003, 46–49.
10 Contrast Ebner 2003, 95–96, 107, who envisages (as J. Murphy O'Connor already did) a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during which Jesus encountered John.
11 While this assumption is not completely undisputed, it is thoroughly probable.
12 The juxtaposition of the baptizing activity of John and the proclamation of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels is also a specific interpretation of their relation: the one baptizes "only" with water, whereas the other baptizes with Spirit (and fire)—he thus brings one into direct contact with God's Spirit and judgment. This interpretation, which does not reckon with a baptizing activity of Jesus in a literal sense, should not be given historical precedence per se. In recent portrayals of Jesus it has again become more common to reckon with a baptizing activity of Jesus—albeit prior to his independent activity: Dunn 2003; Ebner 2003, 98–99. Meier 1994, 126–29, 166–67, even hypothesizes that Jesus also held fast to a baptizing practice later. This, however, is improbable. For a recent work that disputes the historical reliability of John on this point, see Lincoln 2005, 42–44, 163–67.
13 The comment that Jesus is baptizing more disciples than John is qualified there with the caveat "Although Jesus himself did not baptize, but his disciples."
14 Thus especially in the so-called "Taufbefehl" (command to baptize) at the end of the Gospel of Matthew.
15 Cf. Luke 7.24-28 (Q).
16 One can also understand Q 7.28 differently: even the *smallest* (thus in effect everyone) becomes greater than John in the reign of God. This is possible grammatically. But it can hardly be assumed that John is meant to be placed so low

with regard to the reign of God. It is more likely, therefore, that it is a matter of specifying the relationship between Jesus and John: the one who is initially *smaller* (Jesus as a disciple of John) then becomes the *greater* (namely in the reign of God).

## Chapter 8

1 This is rightly stressed by Freyne 2004, 41-42.
2 Cf. "Jesus' Talk about the Reign of God" in ch. 9.
3 In a famous inscription with which the Julian solar calendar was introduced in the provinces of Asia Minor at the beginning of the first century CE, the "birth of the god" (Emperor Augustus is meant) is referred to as the "beginning of the good tidings [i.e., gospels]."
4 Here, "gospel" is thus not yet a designation for a literary genre but for the content of a work: it designates this content as "good news" about the salvation that has come in Jesus Christ.
5 These include, e.g., the parable of the good and evil tree from Luke (Q) 6.43-45, which is found in the mouth of Jesus in Matt 12.33-35 and is even connected in 12.34 with the address "brood of vipers," which is also used by John. It will be necessary to deal with further judgment sayings in the proclamation of Jesus at a later point.
6 Cf. Wolter 2002.
7 Ebner 2003, 100–104, speaks of a "key experience": Jesus is said to have observed a meteor and interpreted it as Satan falling from heaven. Cf. further Müller 2002, 63.
8 Cf. Dunn 2003, 455–61; Becker 1996, 132–33.
9 Cf. "God or Satan?" below.
10 Cf. most recently Theobald 2005. By contrast, Rusam 2004 hypothesizes that the saying was formulated by the author of Luke.
11 Cf. Ebner 2003, 102; Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 236; 1998, 258.
12 In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, the activity in Galilee and the neighboring pagan regions was understood as the beginning of the Gentile mission. This, however, goes clearly beyond the intention of Jesus.
13 Cf. "Homelessness, Discipleship, and the Circle of the Twelve" below.
14 This is rightly stressed by Moxnes 2003, 49–53.
15 In Exod 8.19 "finger of God" means the power that Moses possesses in contrast to the Egyptian magicians and with which he brings about the Egyptian plagues. Matthew names instead the more common "Spirit of God," which does not mean anything different materially.
16 In the Jewish sphere one would have to think here, in addition to the Eleazar mentioned by Josephus, of figures such as Honi the Circle-Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa.
17 4Q521, frag. 2, col. ii, ll. 12–13, translated by Martínez/Tigchelaar 1998, 1045. Cf. Maier 1995/1996, 684: "Dann heilt Er Durchbohrte und Tote belebt Er. Armen(/Demütigen) verkündet Er (Gutes), und [Niedrige] (?) wird er

sät[tigen, Ve]rlassene (?) wird Er leiten und Hungernde rei[ch machen (?)]" (Then he heals the pierced and the dead he revives. To the poor (/humble) he proclaims (good), and [the low] (?) he will sat[isfy,] the for[saken] (?) he will lead and the hungry he will [make (?)] ri[ch]).

18 In Q the sentence "the one who is not with me is against me and the one who does not gather scatters" corresponds to this. On this cf. "Opponents" in ch. 8.

19 A similar formulation is found, e.g., in Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40–110): "For all philosophers life is difficult in the hometown" (*Orations* 30, 6). Epictetus (ca. 55–135) mentions that the philosopher avoids his hometown (*Diatribai* 3.16.11). In the Jesus tradition the prophet takes the place of the philosopher.

20 It is occasionally hypothesized that the version of the *Gospel of Thomas* is older than that of the Gospel of Mark, which is said to have changed the second part ("a physician does not heal those who know him") into the immediately following statement that Jesus could not do a mighty work in Nazareth. This, however, is unlikely. For Mark mentions that Jesus could heal a few sick people (6.5). Moreover, the double saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* could presuppose the version of the Gospel of Luke, since both speak of the prophet "being welcome."

21 Cf., e.g., Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 159; 1998, 166–67; Dunn 2003, 317.

22 Matthew presents it as though Jesus would come with the change of location into the Israelite tribes Zebulun and Naphtali. In actuality Nazareth was located in the region of Zebulun and Capernaum in Naphtali.

23 Q 10.13-15.

24 When Jesus visits Capernaum for the first time in John 2.12, it is immediately added that he stayed there for only a short time. Capernaum crops up only twice subsequently: as the location of the healing of the royal official (the "second sign" of Jesus) in 4.46-54 and as the location of the bread discourse in John 6. Is the significance of Capernaum in John even consciously played down?

25 Luke 9.61-62, presumably an episode added by Luke to Q in which the episode about the calling of Elisha stands in the background again, which is intensified by the prohibition against saying goodbye to one's parents.

26 Cf. "Anticipation of the Reign of God: The Ethos of the Disciples of Jesus" in ch. 10.

27 That the establishment of the circle goes back to Jesus is not completely undisputed, but it is widely accepted in recent scholarship. Cf., e.g., Becker 1996, 33–34; Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 200–201; 1998, 216–17; Dunn 2003, 507–11.

28 The Gospel of Matthew and Acts as well as Papias, the bishop of Hieropolis, from the beginning of the second century report on the death of Judas.

29 Mark 14.10, 20, 43 par.; John 6.71

30 Mark 3.16-19; Matt 10.2-4; Luke 6.14-16; Acts 1.13.

31 For Peter, see further Böttrich 2001; Bockmuehl 2010; 2012.

32 Cf. the episode of the election of Matthias in Acts 1.15-26. This is also alluded to in the *Gospel of Judas*.

33 Cf. Q 6.40: a disciple is not over his teacher (cf. John 13.16).

34 Cf. "Non-Christian Sources" in ch. 3.
35 Cf. also "Jesus and the Purity Laws" in ch. 10.
36 Listings of permitted and forbidden animals for consumption are found in Lev 11 and in Num 14.
37 Reference is occasionally made to these procedures in the Jesus tradition: in Mark 1.44 Jesus exhorts the healed leper to make the purity offering required by Moses (cf. Lev 14). In the background of Luke 2.22 stands the regulation according to which a woman who has given birth to a child must undergo purification after seven days (Lev 12).
38 This custom stands behind the explanatory remark in Mark 7.3-4.
39 The term "offensive purity" was coined by K. Berger.
40 Cf. "God or Satan?" in this chapter.
41 Cf. also "The Reign of God as the Beginning of the Time of Salvation" in ch. 9.
42 Matt 8.5-13/Luke 7.1-10; John 4.46-54.
43 This could explain why the question of circumcision nowhere plays a role in the Jesus tradition, but immediately becomes relevant in the moment at which Christianity decides to carry out Gentile mission. Early Christianity could not appeal here to a praxis or saying of Jesus—and it also did not "invent" a corresponding tradition.
44 Cf., e.g., Tob 13.5; *Pss. Sol.* 17.26-29.
45 Cf. ch. 6, "The Jew."
46 Cf. the corresponding chapter in Sanders 1993, 205–37.
47 Cf. "Jesus and the Jewish Law" in ch. 10.

## Chapter 9

1 Cf. "Is Jesus the Christ?" in ch. 11.
2 So, e.g., Isa 24–27, Zech 12–14, and Dan 2 and 7.
3 This English translation is taken from Tromp 1993. For a German translation, see Brandenburger 1976.
4 This notion can be found in other texts in a similar manner. Thus, e.g., the so-called *War Scroll* from Qumran speaks of the eschatological battle of God against the adversary Belial and his destruction.
5 Mark 13.24-27; cf. Luke 17.24-37/Matt 24.15-28.
6 Verses 11-14 are an expansion by Matthew, which thereby relates the parable to the Christian community.
7 Cf. "Beyond the Wilderness" in ch. 8.
8 Mark 1.15: "The time is fulfilled and the reign of God has come to you." Cf. "Beyond the Wilderness" in ch. 8.
9 "If I drive out the demons with the finger of God, then the reign of God has arrived among you." Cf. "God or Satan?" in ch. 8.
10 In the Gospel of Matthew a somewhat longer version of this prayer is handed down than in Luke. A third version is found in the *Didache*. The wording of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples can no longer be exactly reconstructed. Different versions were evidently in use in Christianity from an early time.

11 Cf., e.g., Wis 14.3; Sir 23.1, 4; 51.10; Tob 13.4; *Jos. Asen.* 12.14-15.
12 Cf. also Welker/Wolter 1999.
13 By contrast, Matthew has combined the versions from Mark and Q with each other.

## Chapter 10

1 Thus also Becker 1996, 276–88.
2 Cf. "Homelessness, Discipleship, and the Circle of the Twelve" in ch. 8.
3 Matthew placed this text in the Sermon on the Mount and thereby generalized it.
4 Cf. 1 Thess 2.9; 1 Cor 9.1-18; 2 Cor 11.7-9; 12.13; Phil 4.15.
5 On what follows, cf. also Schröter 2003.
6 Thus, Huber 1982, 139.
7 K. Berger uses this expression in an analogous context (the threat of judgment as a final appeal to Israel) to describe a certain facet of the Jesus tradition. Cf. Berger 1984, 56 and 375.
8 Matthew interprets the name of Jesus in this sense: he is called "Jesus" because he will save his people from their sins (Matt 1.21: the Hebrew meaning of "Jehoshua," "Yahweh is help," evidently stands in the background); he is called "Immanuel," which translated means "God with us" (1.23: a translation of "Immanuel" into Greek).
9 Cf. Q 7.34; Mark 2.14-17; Luke 19.1-10.
10 Cf. Mark 2.1-12; Matt 9.1-8.
11 In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* the two are often placed alongside each other: *T. Iss.* 5.2; *T. Dan* 5.3; *T. Jos.* 11.1; *T. Benj.* 3.3. In the *Letter of Aristeas* 229 fear of God and love are coordinated with each other. The worship of God is frequently designated as the first and most important commandment.
12 The controversy in Mark 10.2-12 leads precisely to this: Jesus criticizes the divorce that is allowed in principle in the law (cf. Deut 24.1-4) by referencing the order of creation: since God created human beings as man and woman (Gen 1.27), a man shall leave his father and mother and become one flesh with his wife (Gen 2.24).
13 The formulation of Luz 1990, 233 is on target: "A similar tension appears in our text as in Matt 5.17-48: Jesus does not contradict the Torah in its depths, but it is by virtue of his absolute sovereignty that he does not contradict it."
14 Passages in the Pauline or post-Pauline letters refer to this: Gal 4.10-11; Rom 14.5; Col 2.16.
15 CD XI, 13-17. Cf. also fr. 4Q265.
16 Cf. "Purity for the Impure" in ch. 8.
17 This question led to a serious conflict between Paul and Peter and with this to the first far-reaching controversy within emerging Christianity. Cf. Gal 2.11-14. Cf. Schröter 2013, 133–83.
18 A second such sphere would be circumcision. This, however, can be left unconsidered here, since this issue does not play a role in the Jesus tradition.

19 The version in Matthew is less fundamental than the one in Mark. It relates the sentence specifically to food (what goes *into the mouth* / comes *out of the mouth*) and leaves out the expression "he declared all foods to be clean." In Mark, by contrast, the concern is with the *heart* of the human being (Mark 7.18-19).

## Chapter 11

1 An explainable exception is Acts 7.56: here Stephen sees in a vision the exalted Son of Man, who stands at the right hand of God. In John 9.35 "Son of Man" is used within a confession statement: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" A later stage of the use of this designation is already shown in this usage.
2 Matthew at least understood the saying in this way: in his version (Matt 10.32-33) there is also an "I" in the following sentences instead of the Son of Man expression found in Mark and Luke.
3 As in the previous passage, here Matthew again has an "I" instead of the Son of Man expression. Perhaps we are dealing here with a later replacement, but it is also possible that the saying was secondarily transformed from an I saying to a Son of Man saying.
4 This is also the case in the two passages of Revelation in which there is an allusion to the vision in Daniel (Rev 1.13; 14.14). Cf. also the anarthrous occurrence of "Son of Man" in Heb 2.6.
5 Mark 8.38; 13.26; 14.62.
6 Thus Ignatius in *To the Ephesians* 20.2.
7 See "What Does the Concept 'Reign of God' Mean?" in ch. 9.
8 CD II.12: the anointed ones of his Holy Spirit; 1 QM XI.7-8; 11Q13 II.18: the anointed of the Spirit, with reference to Isa 52.7; 61.1 and Dan 9.25.
9 4Q252, fr. 1 V.1-5: the anointed of righteousness, the shoot of David; 4Q161, fr. 8/9.11-25: a shoot of David (with reference to Isa 11); 4Q458, fr. 2 II.6: anointed with the oil of kingly rule.
10 This English translation is taken from Wright 1985. For a critical edition of the Greek text with a less literal English translation, see Wright 2007. For a German translation, see Holm-Nielsen 1977.
11 Mark 9.41, where the expression occurs in the mouth of Jesus, belongs in a later period and presupposes the exchangeability of "Jesus" and "Christ." Cf. also Matt 23.10.

## Chapter 12

1 Cf. the justified criticism of such a scenario in Becker 1996, 407.
2 So also Freyne 2004, 115.
3 We already saw this in Mark 3.6: here the Pharisees and Herodians already form the resolution to kill Jesus at the beginning of his activity.
4 Cf. also the pointer in Theissen/Merz 2001 [1996], 378–79; 1998, 429.
5 Cf. Bovon 1996, 462: "If there is a section in the Gospels that preserves the interpretation that the historical Jesus gave to his activity and the end of his life, then it is here."

6 On this office designation, cf. the inscription from Caesarea Maritima cited in "Remains" in ch. 3.
7 The latter question is contested because the relationship between the Gospel of John and the Synoptics has not yet been able to be explained satisfactorily. We can let this issue rest here.
8 So, e.g., J. D. G. Dunn; S. Freyne; G. Theissen/A. Merz.
9 Sanders 1991, 10–12; cf. 1993, 254–62.
10 So, e.g., M. Ebner; J. Becker.
11 The end of the saying is missing. H.-M. Schenke suggests that one add "except me!" Cf. Schenke 2001. With this addition the saying would be an interesting variant of the versions in the New Testament Gospels. Due to the gap in the text, however, it remains uncertain.
12 According to Josephus, *Ant.* 15.380, Herod the Great began with the fundamental reconstruction and expansion of the temple in the eighteenth year of his reign. This would be in ca. 20/19 BCE. John would thus presuppose ca. 27 CE for the situation portrayed by him.
13 In a similar way Jesus predicts his crucifixion in John 8.28 in a riddle. There it says that the Jews will "lift up" the Son of Man—in spite of the fact that the Romans *actually* crucified Jesus!
14 There is also no temple in the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21 because this is made unnecessary through the presence of God and the Lamb.
15 In what follows we will limit ourselves to aspects that are connected with the historical situation of the last supper. For further aspects that are connected with the emergence and interpretation of this meal in early Christianity, cf. Schröter 2006; 2009.
16 In the Gospel of John there is no institution of a last supper. The corresponding tradition is sketched into the interpretation of the way of Jesus as a whole: he gives his flesh for the world; one must eat his flesh and drink his blood to receive a share of him and have eternal life (John 6.51-58).
17 The mention of the shed blood of the covenant alludes to the making of a new covenant by Jesus, which includes the removal of previous sins. This is revealed in the "for many" or "for you" of the cup saying. More far-reaching interpretative categories such as "atonement" (*Sühne*) or "substitution/vicariousness" (*Stellvertretung*), however, require interpretation for their part and are controversial at present. Therefore, we will table them here.
18 Luke introduces another version of this saying that does not contain an interpretation of Jesus' death: "For who is greater: the one reclining at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22.27).

## Chapter 13

1 On this cf. also the comments of Dunn 2003, 825–28, which go in this same direction.
2 H. Schürmann already pointed to this. Cf. Schürmann 1994, 85–104, 380–97.

3 Philo, *Flacc.* 83. Cf. the mention of this text in Ebner 2003, 214.
4 The most famous is the vision in Ezek 37.1-14, which deals with a revivification of the bones of Israel. Cf. Isa 26.19.
5 After the flight of the women from the empty tomb, the *Gospel of Peter* mentions the twelve disciples, who each go home, and then Simon Peter, Andrew, and Levi, who go to the sea with their nets. The text breaks off here. It is possible that an appearance before these three followed at the Sea of Galilee.
6 Origen, *Contra Celsus* 2.57-61.
7 So Vollenweider 2002, 305, with reference to Phil 2.6-11.
8 The exclusive use of this expression as a designation of majesty for Jesus must therefore be distinguished from statements that speak of many people being children of God. Thus, it can also be said in the New Testament that peacemakers are called "sons of God" (Matt 5.9) or that the mission of the Son of God mediates a share in this sonship to human beings.

## Chapter 14

1 The Circumcellions were a radical Christian group that especially lived in Numidia and Mauretania in northern Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries. They frequently sought voluntary martyrdom. The name is derived from the fact that they lived around the altar shrines (*circum cellas*).
2 Eco 2002, 362–76.
3 Therefore, they are also called "Artotyrites" (from "artos" = bread and "tyreo" = to make cheese, or alternatively, to confuse).
4 Eco 2002, 366.
5 Eco 2002, 369.
6 Cf. "Christian Writings outside the New Testament" in ch. 3. Cf. Schröter 2013, 305–13.
7 Under this aspect the writing is rightly given extensive coverage by J. Becker in his portrayal of Mary. See Becker 2001, 252–81. Cf., e.g., Gaventa 1999, 100–125.
8 A recent example is the bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, which has also been made into a movie. Whatever judgment one reaches about the book and film as thrillers, the supposedly "historical facts" upon which the story is based are arbitrary assertions rather than serious results of research.
9 Cf. ch. 4, "The Nazarene."

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